



SENATE BILL 257: 2026 Appropriations Act, Sec. 7.54: Released Time Religious Instruction.

2025-2026 General Assembly

Analysis of: S.L. 2026-41, Sec. 7.54

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Section 7.54 of S.L. 2026-41 (Senate Bill 257), as amended by Section 3.11 of S.L. 2026-61 (House Bill 268), adds absences for released time religious instruction as a new category of excused absences. School officials must excuse absences for released time religious instruction pursuant to a policy adopted by the student's public school unit (PSU).

All PSUs must adopt a policy that requires school principals to excuse a student's absence from school to attend released time religious instruction. "Released time religious instruction" means religious instruction offered by a private entity during the school day. The policy must provide for the following:

- A standard written consent form for the student's parents to sign and return to the school. The consent form must provide parents with notice that the parent is responsible for arranging transportation for the student to attend released time religious instruction.
- A requirement that parents provide the school with documentation affirming that the parent's child attended released time religious instruction.
- A requirement that students attending released time religious instruction make up any missed work.
- That the PSU will not use State or local funds to facilitate a student's attendance at released time religious instruction.
- That the PSU will not allow a private entity to access school facilities to conduct released time religious instruction, unless otherwise permitted by a neutral facility use policy.
- That the PSU must authorize excused absences for at least one, but no more than four, hours of released time religious instruction per calendar week.

This section allows the State Board of Education (SBE) to adopt a rule that requires a student's parent to give the principal written notice of the request for an excused absence a reasonable time before the released time religious instruction. The SBE must adopt a rule that requires that students be given the opportunity to make up any tests or other work missed because of released time religious instruction.

This section became effective July 7, 2026, and applies beginning with the 2026-2027 school year.

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