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H.B. 531
136th General Assembly

Bill Analysis

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsors: Reps. Newman and Ritter

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SUMMARY

- Permits school districts, community schools, and STEM schools to receive support, services, and programs for students by a volunteer chaplain.
- Requires each school district or school to vote on whether to adopt a policy authorizing a district or school to accept a volunteer chaplain beginning in the 2026-2027 school year.
- Subjects a volunteer chaplain under this bill to a criminal records check and requires the chaplain to register with the Department of Education and Workforce.
- Permits each district or school to establish requirements or procedures as necessary to implement its volunteer chaplain program.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

The bill permits school districts, community schools, and STEM schools to accept a volunteer chaplain to provide support, services, and programs during school hours for any student with written permission from the student's parent or legal guardian. The chaplain support, services, and programs may be offered in addition to, but not in lieu of, school counselor services.¹

Under the bill, each board of trustees of a school district or governing authority of a school must, by December 1, 2026, vote in a public meeting of the board or authority on whether to adopt a policy authorizing the district or school to accept a volunteer chaplain beginning in the 2026-2027 school year.²

¹ R.C. 3313.475, 3314.03(A)(11)(d), and 3326.11.

² R.C. 3313.475(C)(3).

The bill defines a chaplain as a religious professional who has received endorsement or certification by a recognized ecclesiastical endorsing agency and who provides spiritual programming, support, and counseling outside of a traditional church setting, such as hospitals, the armed services, prisons, law enforcement agencies, and schools.³

The bill does not require a chaplain to apply for a license or certification with the State Board of Education. However, the bill requires each volunteer chaplain to submit a criminal records check through the Department of Education and Workforce and to register with the Department during the time in which the chaplain is volunteering at the district or school.⁴ The bill prevents the Department from accepting the application of a chaplain who has pleaded guilty to, has been found guilty by a jury or court of, or has been convicted of any offense that requires the State Board to revoke or deny renewal of a teaching license.⁵

Finally, the bill permits each district or school to establish requirements or procedures as necessary to implement its volunteer chaplain program.⁶

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	10-21-25

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³ R.C. 3313.475(A).

⁴ R.C. 3313.475(B), and (C); R.C. 3319.391, not in the bill.

⁵ R.C. 3313.475(C)(2); R.C. 3319.31(C), not in the bill.

⁶ R.C. 3313.475(F).