



HB 1792

Sponsor: Jim Murphy

PART 1 – QUICK SNAPSHOT

1.1 One-Paragraph Overview

HB 1792 creates a **state-run “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking” pilot program** in 5–7 “diverse” school districts during the 2027–28 and 2028–29 school years, run by DESE and aimed at students from preschool through 12th grade. It requires pilot districts to integrate “media literacy” into daily classroom work, covering news, social media, “bias and stereotypes,” “algorithms,” “misinformation,” and digital “ethics” and “footprints.” DESE must then use the results to draft **statewide media-literacy and critical-thinking standards** and recommendations for a future statewide program. In practice, this hands DESE broad power to shape how Missouri children are taught to judge news, media, and online speech—many of the most hotly disputed political, moral, and cultural issues of our time. Given DESE’s track record, this is a serious risk for parental rights, viewpoint neutrality, and a Biblical, constitutional worldview in Missouri classrooms.

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1.2 Triage Table

- **Single-subject (Art. III §23):**
 - **Yes.** Everything ties back to a single subject: a DESE-run “media literacy and critical thinking” pilot program and related standards.

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- **Does it grow government?**
 - **Yes.** Adds a new DESE program, reporting, professional-development structures, and a pathway to new statewide standards and future mandates.

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- **Overall impact on Missouri families:**
 - **Hurts.** It centralizes control over what counts as “misinformation,” “bias,” and “acceptable” digital behavior in DESE’s hands, with no real protections for parents, religious liberty, or ideological balance.

- **Alignment with Act for Missouri core beliefs:**

Act for Missouri 2026 Legislation...

- **Undermines.** It strengthens unelected bureaucracy (DESE), weakens parental control over children's moral and intellectual formation, and risks using schools to police viewpoints and speech rather than teach genuine critical thinking.
 - **Recommended stance:**
 - **STRONGLY OPPOSE.**
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PART 2 – PURPOSE & PROVISION MAP

2.1 Stated Purpose & Title

- **Apparent purpose (in plain English):**
To test and develop a **state-directed media-literacy program** in a handful of districts, then use those results to create **statewide media-literacy and critical-thinking standards** and recommendations.

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- **Title:** “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Act” (and pilot program).

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- **Evaluation:** The title sounds harmless and academic, but **does not clearly warn** that DESE will use this to draft **statewide standards and policy recommendations** on controversial issues like “misinformation,” “algorithms,” and “rhetoric that incites violence.” It is not false, but it is **softer than the real impact.**

2.2 Provision-by-Provision Map

Provision 1 – Definition of “Media Literacy”

- **Location:** §161.355.2.

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- **What it does (plain language):**
Defines “media literacy” broadly as accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and participating in all forms of media (including news and social media), recognizing bias and stereotypes, digital citizenship and internet safety, and integrating media-analysis into daily classroom curriculum.
- **Tag: [Concern]**

- **Why:** The definition is **wide open and value-laden** (“bias,” “stereotypes,” “digital citizenship”) without any guardrails. Whoever controls these definitions controls how students are taught to view news, politics, morality, and religion.
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Provision 2 – Creates a DESE-Run Pilot Program (2027–28 & 2028–29)

- **Location:** §161.355.3–4.

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- **What it does:**

- Orders DESE to create the “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Pilot Program.”
- DESE will choose 5–7 “diverse” districts to participate and supply data.

- **Tag: [Concern]**

- **Why:** Gives DESE discretion to choose districts and design how the pilot is run. “Diverse” is undefined and could easily mean districts aligned with **pre-selected political or ideological goals**, not ideological diversity.
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Provision 3 – Requirements for Pilot Program Sites

- **Location:** §161.355.5.

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- **What it does:**

Requires pilot sites to:

- Address **each component** of media literacy.
- Integrate media literacy into daily classroom curriculum at all or selected grade levels.
- Identify “high-quality resources.”
- Demonstrate and report how they teach:
 - News content literacy (distinguishing “verified information” from opinion/propaganda).
 - Visual literacy (interpreting images, ads, maps, etc.).
 - Digital fluency and digital literacy (norms of safe, “responsible” tech use, how media influences attitudes, how networked tech affects behavior and perception).

- **Tag: [Red Flag]**
 - **Why:** This pushes **DESE-approved frameworks and “high-quality resources”** into **daily curriculum**, across subjects. Terms like “verified information,” “propaganda,” and “influences attitudes” are ripe for **political and ideological abuse**—especially when DESE decides what counts as “verified” and which sources are “propaganda.”
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Provision 4 – Student Guidelines on Social Media, “Misinformation,” and Digital Ethics

- **Location:** §161.355.6.

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- **What it does:**

Says guidelines developed from the pilot will provide students information on:

- Purpose/acceptable use of social media platforms.
- “Behavior that ensures cybersafety, cybersecurity, and cyber ethics.”
- Negative consequences of irresponsible use (cyberbullying).
- How to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act on digital/written communication.
- “Digital ethics, etiquette, respectful discourse… safety, security, digital footprints, and the identification of rhetoric that incites violence.”
- Cyberbullying prevention and response.
- “The significance of algorithms.”
- “Ways to identify online misinformation.”
- General knowledge of the economic structure of the digital landscape.
- Teaching about the **right to freedom of speech** and how online interaction in school settings is protected, as defined by DESE.

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- **Tag: [Red Flag]**
- **Why:** This is where DESE is empowered to **define “misinformation,” “rhetoric that incites violence,” “acceptable use,” and “cyber ethics.”** In today’s climate, those phrases are frequently used to **shut down conservative, Christian, or dissenting views** while protecting progressive orthodoxy. The bill hands DESE the job of teaching students which speech and sources are trustworthy and which are dangerous—an enormous, highly politicized power.

Provision 5 – Guidelines for Districts: Activities, Resources, Training

- **Location:** §161.355.7.

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- **What it does:**

Requires the guidelines to include **sample learning activities, resources, and training** that promote “critical thinking” and evaluation of all media forms for districts.

- **Tag: [Concern]**

- **Why:** This moves from “pilot” to **DESE-curated curricular toolkits**, very likely to come from national media-literacy and digital-citizenship groups that tend to lean left politically. There are **no protections** for viewpoint diversity or parental review.
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Provision 6 – Reporting and Drafting Statewide Standards

- **Location:** §161.355.8–9.

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- **What it does:**

- Pilot sites submit reports by August 1, 2029.
- DESE must compile a summary to the General Assembly by January 1, 2030, including:
 - Insights on how pilot addressed media literacy.
 - A “compendium” of high-quality strategies and resources.
 - Professional-development used/required.
 - Recommendations for facilities/materials/tech needed for a statewide program.
 - “Exploration” of additional policies and **legislative recommendations** to implement best practices statewide.
 - **A draft of proposed media-literacy and critical-thinking state standards for preschool–grade 12.**

- **Tag: [Red Flag]**

- **Why:** This is explicitly a **pipeline to permanent statewide policy**. Once DESE drafts P-12 standards and presents “best practices,” it will be very hard for legislators and local

boards to resist. The bill effectively **outsources future law and standards-writing to DESE and its chosen experts.**

Provision 7 – Inclusion in State Standards Review & Sunset

- **Location:** §161.355.10–12.

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- **What it does:**
 - Requires standards developed under this section to be included for consideration at the next state standards review after the pilot ends.
 - Ends the pilot June 30, 2029 and sunsets the section December 31, 2029.
- **Tag: [Concern]**
- **Why:** The **pilot language sunsets, but the standards it spawns do not.** This is a classic “temporary bill, permanent impact” structure.

2.3 Changes to Existing Law

- **Statute affected:**
 - Adds **new §161.355** to chapter 161, RSMo, creating a new program and policy area under DESE.

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- **Current law (in substance):**
 - DESE already has broad authority over learning standards and curriculum frameworks, but there is **no specific statutory mandate** for a statewide media-literacy program with defined components like “online misinformation,” “algorithms,” and “digital ethics.”
- **What changes if the bill passes:**
 - DESE gains **explicit statutory authority** and a directive to:
 - Run a media-literacy pilot;
 - Develop guidelines and sample resources;
 - Recommend facility and technology changes;
 - Draft statewide media-literacy & critical-thinking standards;
 - Recommend further **policies and legislation** for statewide implementation.

- In practice, DESE's role as **gatekeeper of what is true, false, biased, or “violent rhetoric”** in the media/online space for Missouri kids will be significantly strengthened.
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PART 3 – CONSTITUTIONAL & PROCESS CHECKS

3.1 Single-Subject & Original-Purpose

- **Main subject:**
A DESE-run **media literacy and critical thinking pilot program** leading to guidelines and state standards.
- **Additional subjects:**
 - Standards-writing for preschool–12.
 - Guidance on social-media behavior and online speech.
 - Legislative recommendations and potential future statewide programs.
- **Are all provisions related?**
 - Yes, they're all tied to the same general subject of media literacy and DESE's implementation of it. There are no obvious “riders” unrelated to education/media.
- **Title & clear subject:**
 - Title is generally accurate but **muted**; it does not clearly say, “creates a pilot to prepare statewide standards and legislative recommendations on media literacy, misinformation, and digital ethics.”
- **Original-purpose shift?**
 - No evidence provided here of committee substitutes or drastic changes.

Conclusion:

Likely complies with the single-subject and clear-title requirements **formally**, but the title is **incomplete** about how far this pilot will reach into statewide standards and policy.

3.2 U.S. & Missouri Constitutional Rights

Potential problem areas:

1. **Free Speech – U.S. First Amendment & Missouri Constitution Art. I §§ 8–9**
 - Bill text: guidelines will cover:

- “Social media behavior,” “cybersafety,” “cyber ethics”;
- “The identification of rhetoric that incites violence”;
- “Ways to identify online misinformation”;
- DESE will explain “the applicability of protections for freedom of speech for online interaction in school settings.”

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- Concern:
 - The bill gives DESE **broad discretion** to define what counts as “misinformation” and “rhetoric that incites violence.” In current practice, these labels are often used to suppress unpopular but lawful political, religious, or scientific views.
 - When DESE teaches students **which viewpoints and sources are “misinformation” and which are “truth,”** this can become **viewpoint discrimination** and a de facto state orthodoxy.
 - Teaching “acceptable use” and “cyber ethics” without clear limits can pressure students to **self-censor** lawful speech in and out of school.
- How it could be unconstitutional / invite litigation:
 - If DESE standards or district policies resulting from this program discipline, chill, or penalize students/teachers for lawful online speech, that could violate the First Amendment and Missouri’s own strong speech protections.

2. Parental Rights & Religious Liberty – Missouri Const. Art. I § 5, plus substantive due process principles

- The program addresses children’s beliefs about news, politics, morality, and which sources to trust, without any requirement for parental opt-in, opt-out, or curriculum transparency.

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- For Christian families, this can **intrude into a core area of moral and spiritual formation**—teaching children how to discern truth and falsehood. A state-run “media literacy” regime that contradicts biblical teaching or brands it as “bias” or “harm” would directly undermine parents’ primary role.

Bottom line: This bill sets up the framework for **future free-speech and parental-rights conflicts**. The constitutional harm will show up in **DESE standards and district policies** that follow, but the enabling structure is created here.

3.3 Delegation & Unelected Power

- **Delegated to DESE:**
 - Design and run the pilot (§161.355.3–5).
 - Decide what counts as “media literacy,” “high quality resources,” “algorithms,” “misinformation,” “rhetoric that incites violence,” and “cyber ethics” (§161.355.2, .5–.6).
 - Draft **state standards**, professional development models, technology recommendations, and **legislative recommendations** (§161.355.9).

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- **Standards/guardrails given by the legislature:**
 - Almost none. There is no requirement for:
 - Viewpoint neutrality;
 - Protection of religious or political diversity;
 - Parent review or opt-out;
 - Explicit protection of lawful speech even if labeled “misinformation” by some groups.
- **Result:**
 - The General Assembly is effectively **outsourcing a controversial, worldview-heavy policy area** to DESE and its chosen “experts.”
 - This is a classic **separation-of-powers concern**: practical law-making (what students must learn and how they must think about media) is pushed to unelected bureaucrats with wide discretion.

PART 4 – IMPACT ON MISSOURI FAMILIES

4.1 Economic, Tax, and Utility Impacts

- **Short term:**
 - Some increased costs for participating districts (resources, training, technology) and for DESE administration and analysis. The bill does not spell out funding sources, but costs will be borne by state and local taxpayers one way or another.

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- **Long term:**

- The real cost is not just money but **control**: once statewide standards are in place, districts may need new tech, materials, and training to comply, which could mean **ongoing spending** and vendor contracts, likely with national “media literacy” providers.

4.2 Freedom, Parental Rights, and Education

- **Parental rights:**

- The bill never mentions parents, parental consent, or opt-out.
- It allows DESE and schools to tell children **how to evaluate media, which sources are credible, and what is “misinformation”**—core matters many Christian parents believe are **their responsibility** under Scripture.
- There is **no requirement** to involve parents in selecting “high-quality resources” or to ensure that Christian or conservative perspectives are treated fairly.

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- **Local control:**

- While it begins as a pilot, the required draft P-12 media-literacy standards will heavily **shape future statewide standards reviews**. Local boards will be under strong pressure to adopt DESE’s model.

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- **Content risk:**

- Phrases like “recognize bias and stereotypes” and “respectful discourse with individuals who have differing opinions” are regularly used in practice to push **DEI/CRT-style frameworks** that paint biblical views on life, marriage, and gender as “harmful” or “hateful.”

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- By teaching students to see certain views as “propaganda,” “misinformation,” or “incitement,” the program could **condition children to distrust their own parents, churches, and conservative media** and to trust only establishment-approved sources.

Net effect on parental rights and family freedom:

Negative. It strengthens DESE’s authority and weakens parents’ ability to direct how their children are taught to discern truth and falsehood.

4.3 Moral & Cultural Climate

- **Normalizing state control over worldview:**

- “Media literacy” is not just about how to read a graph; it’s about **who you trust** and **what is true**. This bill sets up DESE as the arbiter of those questions in the digital age.
- **Risk to pro-life and biblical views:**
 - While the bill does not explicitly mention abortion, sexuality, gender, or race, media-literacy frameworks in practice often **target pro-life, pro-family, and conservative Christian content** as “misinformation” or “extremism.”
- **Long-term culture impact:**
 - If implemented as written, this program will likely **form the political and moral instincts** of Missouri students in ways that favor big-tech, legacy-media, and establishment narratives and **marginalize dissenting, especially Christian, voices**.

Net impact on Missouri families:

Hurts. It risks turning schools into training grounds for state-approved speech norms and information gatekeeping instead of fostering genuine truth-seeking and respect for family authority.

PART 5 – ACT FOR MISSOURI CORE PRINCIPLES CHECK

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- **100% Pro-Life:**
 - **Not directly implicated / Mixed indirect.** No abortion language, but if DESE or national partners classify pro-life content as “misinformation” or “harmful,” it will undercut pro-life education and activism among youth.
- **Christian & Biblical Values:**
 - **Undermines.** The bill gives DESE power to define “ethics,” “respectful discourse,” and “incitement,” without explicit protection for biblical teaching on controversial moral issues. It is easy to see how Christian truth-claims could be labeled “harmful rhetoric” under such a framework.

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- **Property Taxes & Economic Freedom:**
 - **Not implicated.**
- **Literal / Original-Intent Constitutionalism:**
 - **Undermines.** By delegating vague, open-ended authority over speech-related content (“misinformation,” “incitement”) to DESE, it invites future policies that

will **pressure or restrict lawful speech**, contrary to a strong original-intent reading of the First Amendment and Missouri's Bill of Rights.

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- **Right to Bear Arms:**
 - **Not directly implicated.** (Though in practice, “rhetoric that incites violence” could be stretched to stigmatize some Second Amendment speech; that is speculative from the bill text alone.)
- **State Sovereignty & Tenth Amendment:**
 - **Mixed / Watch.** The bill doesn’t mention federal standards, but terms like “media literacy” and “digital citizenship” typically tap into **national progressive frameworks**. DESE will almost certainly rely on national groups and possibly federal guidance when drafting standards, which could pull Missouri toward those agendas.
- **Nuclear Family & Parental Rights:**
 - **Undermines.** It entrenches the idea that **the state, not parents, will teach children how to interpret news and online content**. No parental opt-in/opt-out or review is required.
- **Homeschool Protection:**
 - **Not directly implicated.** However, if these standards spill into assessment frameworks or graduation expectations, homeschooled could eventually feel indirect pressure.
- **Currency & Financial Control:**
 - **Not implicated.**
- **Election Integrity:**
 - **Not in text, but very relevant in practice.** Media-literacy programs often include election-related content and teach students to trust certain narrative gatekeepers. The bill does not protect viewpoint diversity on contested civic issues like elections.
- **Government Transparency:**
 - **Mixed.** There is a required DESE report to the legislature, which is positive, but there is **no requirement** to disclose the actual curricula, resources, or outside partners to parents and citizens.

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PART 6 – SPECIAL TOPIC TESTS

6.1 Amendment 3 / Personhood & Equal Protection

- Not implicated in the bill text.

6.2 Surveillance, Digital-ID, and Data-Hub Test

- The bill focuses on **teaching about digital behavior**, not building new surveillance infrastructure.
- However, it normalizes:
 - Teaching about “digital footprints” and “algorithms” and “cybersafety,” which can condition students to **accept pervasive tracking as normal** rather than questioning it.

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- No explicit creation of data hubs, biometric IDs, or law-enforcement sharing, but the **worldview** taught may be one of compliance with digital systems rather than skepticism.

Conclusion: Not directly a surveillance infrastructure bill, but contributes to the **cultural softening** that makes surveillance and behavior-shaping easier down the road.

6.3 Utilities, Energy, Data Centers

- Not implicated.

6.4 Federal Money & Strings

- The bill does **not mention funding sources** or federal grants.
- In reality, DESE may seek national media-literacy grants or partner with national organizations, but that is not specified here.

6.5 Model-Legislation / Agenda 21 & 2030 / Globalism Indicators

- Phrases like “media literacy,” “digital citizenship,” “digital fluency,” and “respectful discourse” are **standard jargon** from national and international education initiatives.

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- No explicit references to “sustainable development,” “Agenda 2030,” or global partnerships in the text, but the vocabulary strongly suggests **alignment with broad national/global education trends**, not a uniquely Missouri, parent-driven approach.

PART 7 – RED FLAGS, AMENDMENT IDEAS, & FINAL RECOMMENDATION

7.1 Red-Flag List (Most Serious First)

1. **[Red Flag #1 – DESE Control over “Misinformation” and Speech Norms]**

- **Location:** §161.355.6.

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- **Why:** Empowers DESE to define “online misinformation,” “rhetoric that incites violence,” “cyber ethics,” and acceptable social-media behavior for students statewide—an enormous power over civic and religious discourse.

2. **[Red Flag #2 – Pipeline to Statewide Standards & Policy Without Guardrails]**

- **Location:** §161.355.5, .7–.10.
- **Why:** Uses a limited “pilot” to justify **permanent statewide standards, guidelines, and legislative recommendations** written by DESE and outside “experts,” not by elected legislators accountable to parents.

3. **[Red Flag #3 – Weakens Parental Authority & Local Control]**

- **Location:** Entire section; especially §§2, 5–7.
- **Why:** No mention of parents, no opt-in or opt-out, no requirement to involve families in selecting resources or defining “bias.” It positions DESE and schools, not parents, as the primary judges of truth and falsehood in media.

4. **[Red Flag #4 – Vague, Ideologically Loaded Definitions]**

- **Location:** §161.355.2, .5–.6.
- **Why:** Terms like “bias,” “stereotypes,” “digital ethics,” “respectful discourse,” and “misinformation” are left wide open to interpretation, basically inviting DESE to import ideological frameworks (DEI/CRT, progressive media-gatekeeping) into standards.

5. **[Red Flag #5 – Growth of Bureaucracy & Permanent Influence After Sunset]**

- **Location:** §161.355.9–12.

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- **Why:** Even though the section sunsets, the **standards, professional development, and recommended statewide policies** it triggers will likely live on indefinitely. This is growth in DESE influence dressed up as a temporary pilot.

7.2 Possible Fixes / Amendments (If It Cannot Be Stopped)

From Act for Missouri’s perspective, the only good outcome is **defeat of this bill.**

7.3 Final Recommendation

- **Recommended stance: STRONGLY OPPOSE.**

HB 1792 may appear to be a neutral “critical thinking” and “media literacy” pilot, but in practice it **expands DESE’s power** to define what counts as truth, misinformation, and acceptable speech for Missouri’s children, with **no real safeguards** for parents, free speech, or biblical values. It formally passes the single-subject test but **grows government bureaucracy**, invites ideological gatekeeping, and sets up a pipeline to statewide standards and future mandates. From a Christian, constitutional, pro-family perspective, empowering DESE to decide how our children are taught to review media and online speech is a risk Missouri families **cannot afford**—this bill should be opposed.