A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT
relating to academic freedom for public school teachers providing science instruction.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that:

(1) an important purpose of science education is to inform students about scientific evidence and help students develop critical thinking skills necessary to become intelligent, productive, and scientifically informed citizens;

(2) the teaching of some scientific subjects required to be taught under the curriculum framework developed by the State Board of Education may cause controversy, including climate change, biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, and human cloning;

(3) some teachers may be unsure of expectations concerning how to present information when controversy arises concerning a scientific subject; and

(4) the protection of a teacher’s academic freedom is necessary to enable the teacher to provide effective instruction that serves the purpose stated in Subdivision (1) of this section.

SECTION 2. Subchapter A, Chapter 28, Education Code, is amended by adding Section 28.0162 to read as follows:

Sec. 28.0162. ACADEMIC FREEDOM FOR TEACHERS. (a) The State Board of Education, school district boards of trustees, and school...
district administrators, including school principals, shall endeavor to:

(1) create an environment within public elementary and secondary schools that encourages students to:

(A) explore scientific questions;
(B) learn about scientific evidence;
(C) develop critical thinking skills; and
(D) respond appropriately and respectfully to differences of opinion about scientific subjects required to be taught under the curriculum framework developed by the State Board of Education; and

(2) assist teachers in finding effective ways to present scientific subjects required to be taught under the curriculum framework developed by the State Board of Education that may cause controversy.

(b) The State Board of Education, a school district board of trustees, or a school district administrator, including a school principal, may not prohibit a teacher from helping students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and weaknesses of existing scientific theories included in a course taught in accordance with the curriculum framework developed by the State Board of Education.

(c) This section applies only to teaching scientific subjects included within the curriculum framework developed by the State Board of Education. This section may not be construed to promote:

(1) any religious or nonreligious doctrine; or
(2) discrimination for or against religion or irreligion or a particular set of religious beliefs or nonbeliefs.

SECTION 3. (a) Not later than August 1, 2017, the Texas Education Agency shall notify the State Board of Education and the board of trustees and superintendent of each school district in this state of the provisions of this Act.

(b) Not later than August 15, 2017, each superintendent shall notify each district administrator, including a school principal, and district teacher of the provisions of this Act.

SECTION 4. This Act applies beginning with the 2017-2018 school year.

SECTION 5. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2017.