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### Illinois may back Off 'silence' requirement in schools

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. • Illinois lawmakers on Thursday moved to roll back a controversial new "moment of silence" law, advancing legislation that would make the practice optional rather than mandatory in schools.

The debate started in October when the Illinois Legislature passed a bill that required all schools to begin the day with a "moment of silence" that could be used for prayer or reflection "on the anticipated activities of the day."

That law was subsequently suspended by a Chicago area court pending a constitutional challenge on grounds that it was government-sponsored religious mandate.

Rep. John Fritchey, D-Chicago, sponsor of the current bill to make the practice optional, said his intentions are not "anti-prayer."

In debate in the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee, Fritchey said schools should not be forced to conduct a moment of silence, but rather have the choice.

"If they want to pray, let them do it," he said.

An opponent to the bill, Rev. Robert Vanden Bosch, executive director of Concerned Christian Americans, testified that courts in Texas and Virginia have upheld moment of silence laws.

"As long as there are tests, there will be prayer," Vanden Bosch quipped.

The bill passed by a 12-8 vote, and now moves to the full House.

The bill is HB4180.

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