

HOUSE No. 3958

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Jack Patrick Lewis

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act providing religious accommodations for students at institutions of higher education during exams.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Jack Patrick Lewis</i>	<i>7th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/16/2021</i>
<i>Rebecca L. Rausch</i>	<i>Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex</i>	<i>7/6/2021</i>
<i>Alan Silvia</i>	<i>7th Bristol</i>	<i>7/6/2021</i>
<i>Harriette L. Chandler</i>	<i>First Worcester</i>	<i>7/8/2021</i>
<i>Natalie M. Higgins</i>	<i>4th Worcester</i>	<i>7/22/2021</i>
<i>Marcos A. Devers</i>	<i>16th Essex</i>	<i>8/3/2021</i>
<i>Bud L. Williams</i>	<i>11th Hampden</i>	<i>11/9/2021</i>

HOUSE No. 3958

By Mr. Lewis of Framingham, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3958) of Jack Patrick Lewis and others relative to providing religious accommodations for students at institutions of higher education during exams. Higher Education.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court
(2021-2022)**

An Act providing religious accommodations for students at institutions of higher education during exams.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 2B of chapter 151C of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2018
2 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the first paragraph the following
3 paragraph:-

4 An institution of higher education shall make alternative accommodations for
5 examinations and other academic requirements when:

6 (a) a student's sincerely held religious belief or practice severely affects the student's
7 ability to perform on an examination or meet an academic requirement; and

8 (b) the student has provided written notice of the specific dates the student requests to
9 have alternative accommodations from the examination or academic requirement.

10 SECTION 2. Said chapter 151C is hereby amended by inserting after section 2B the
11 following section:-

12 Section 2C. (a) Institutions of higher education shall develop policies to accommodate
13 student absences to allow students to take holidays for reasons of faith or conscience or for
14 organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church or
15 religious organization, so that students' grades shall not be adversely impacted by the absences.

16 (b) Students' sincerely held religious beliefs and practices shall be reasonably
17 accommodated with respect to all examinations and other academic requirements. Instructors
18 shall accept at face value the sincerity of the students' religious beliefs and keep requests for
19 accommodation confidential.

20 (c) Institutions of higher education shall conspicuously post to their website:

21 (1) an accessible copy of the institution's religious accommodation policies, including
22 identification of the institution's point of contact for further information; and

23 (2) a non-exhaustive list, provided annually by the commissioner of higher education, of
24 major religious holy days or festivals for the ensuing 3 academic years.

25 (d) Instructors at institutions of higher education shall include in each course syllabus a
26 statement regarding the institution's religious accommodation policy, including a description of
27 the general procedure to request accommodations and information on the point of contact by
28 which students may seek further information about the policy.

29 (e) Institutions of higher education shall provide a process for students to notify the
30 institution's Title IX coordinator, as defined in section 168E of chapter 6, or the coordinator's
31 designee, of any grievances with regard to implementation of this section.

32 SECTION 3. Said chapter 151C is hereby further amended by adding the following
33 section:-

34 Section 6. There shall be a permanent committee consisting of 5 members to be
35 appointed by the governor. Each member shall be appointed for a 3-year term and shall represent
36 a different religious or non-religious community in the commonwealth. The committee shall
37 work with public institutions of higher education on the creation, implementation and
38 enforcement of religious accommodations in regard to admissions, class attendance and the
39 scheduling of examinations and work requirements. The committee shall be an agency for the
40 purposes of chapter 30A.

41 A student who believes that a public institution of higher education has violated section
42 2B or 2C may file a grievance with the committee and the committee shall conduct an
43 adjudicatory proceeding pursuant to chapter 30A.