

Legislative Analysis



MODIFY KALAMAZOO COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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House Bill 5650 as introduced
Sponsor: Rep. Kate Segal
House Committee: Education

Senate Bill 1010 as passed by the Senate
Sponsor: Sen. Tom George
Senate Committee: Education
House Committee: Education

First Analysis (2-16-10)

BRIEF SUMMARY: These two identical bills would eliminate the requirement that 15 or more percent of the Kalamazoo College board of trustees be Baptists in good standing.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would no fiscal impact on state or local government.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Kalamazoo College is a private liberal arts college located in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The college, founded in 1833 by a young Baptist minister named Thomas Merrill, enrolls 1,340 undergraduate students. The students come to school in Michigan from 38 states and 14 countries. The college--sometimes called K College--has 103 fulltime faculty members, 93 percent of whom hold a PhD or the highest degree in their field. The school is a highly selective, nationally known, and internationally oriented school, having one of the nation's foremost collegiate programs to enable study abroad. (See *Background Information*.)

At its founding, the Baptist college was known as the Michigan and Huron Institute--the first school to be chartered by the Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan. Four years later, in 1837, it changed its name to the Kalamazoo Literary Institute. In 1838 the University of Michigan opened its Kalamazoo Branch, and two years later the two schools merged. In 1850 the college received its educational charter from the State of Michigan, and changed its name to Kalamazoo College. Until 1984 when its charter changed, fully 75 percent of its trustees were required to be Baptists. Today the law requires that 15 percent of its trustees--generally numbering between 30 and 35--be Baptists in good standing.

While Kalamazoo College was American Baptist in origin and acknowledges that historical relationship, today it maintains no affiliation with any religious denomination. Nonetheless, its charter specifies that 15 percent of its trustees be active American Baptist congregants. Legislation has been introduced to update the law by removing that requirement.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5650 would amend the 1833 territorial law that establishes Kalamazoo College to eliminate the requirement that at least 15 percent of the college's trustees be members in good standing of Baptist churches affiliated with the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.

Senate Bill 1010 is an identical bill that also eliminates the requirement that 15 or more percent of the Kalamazoo College board of trustees be Baptists in good standing.

MCL 390.753

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For more information about Kalamazoo College, home of the Hornets, visit the college website at <http://www.kzoo.edu>

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The 1833 territorial law that enabled the founding of what is today known as Kalamazoo College specifies that at least 15 percent of the college's trustees be Baptists in good standing. Today, Kalamazoo College is an independent college having no affiliation with any religious denomination. By a unanimous vote of its board of trustees (including the Baptist members), college officials support this bill which will update the 177-year old law to remove the requirement that a portion of the school's trustees be Baptist.

POSITIONS:

Kalamazoo College supports the bills. (2-11-10)

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