

Bill to end bishops' automatic right to sit in Lords introduced

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A [bill](#) to end the automatic right of Anglican bishops to sit in the House of Lords, which the National Secular Society helped to draft, has been introduced to parliament.

Liberal Democrat peer and NSS honorary associate Dick Taverne introduced the [House of Lords \(Removal of Bishops\) Bill](#) on Tuesday.

The private member's bill would end the practice whereby 26 places in the House of Lords are reserved for the Church of England's bishops and archbishops.

In response NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said: "The fact that 26 Church of England bishops are afforded an automatic right to sit in the House of Lords is unjustifiable.

"Giving representatives of one religion a privileged position in the legislature undermines the principle of equal citizenship and puts those who oppose the church's positions at a disadvantage in the democratic process.

"Dick Taverne's bill would strike a blow for fairness, equality and democracy, and we urge parliamentarians to show their support for it."

The NSS also urged supporters to [write to their MPs](#) to encourage them to show support for the bill.

Dick Taverne said: "One of the great achievements of the enlightenment was the separation of church and state. Theocracies in which religion is still part of the state – hardly shining examples of democracy and the protection human rights – show how important this achievement was.

"Although the bishops are liberal minded by comparison, the influence of the Church of England, despite the steep and ongoing decline in the number of Anglicans, should not be underestimated.

"And the separation of church and state is far from complete in the UK. The continued presence of bishops in the Lords is an anachronism that should be addressed."

Notes

- The C of E's two archbishops and 24 of its other diocesan bishops sit in the Lords as the 'lords spiritual'. Religious leaders have sat as the lords spiritual since the 14th century.
- In response to a YouGov poll for [The Times](#), published in 2017, 62% of people said no religious clerics should have "an automatic right to seats" in the legislature. Only 8% said the bishops should retain their seats.
- Iran is the only legislature in the world other than the UK which gives unelected clerics automatic representation.
- The NSS [campaigns](#) for the end of bishops' automatic right to sit in the Lords as part of its work to separate religion and state.

- The bill was [entered](#) in the Lords ballot for private members' bills to be heard during the new parliament in December.
- This week it was [announced](#) that the bishop of Blackburn, Julian Henderson, would become the latest member of the lords spiritual on 6 February.

See also: [Separation of church and state is far from complete in the House of Lords](#), by Dick Taverne for Politics Home.

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