

76th House District

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Sarah LaTourette
Assistant Majority Floor Leader

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Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 428

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for giving Representative Ginter and I the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 428, the Ohio Student Religious Liberties Act.

This legislation is likely familiar to many of you, as it is identical to House Bill 425 from the 131st General Assembly, which passed the House with bipartisan support in 2016.

The concept of this bill really is simple. I believe Representative Hayes, the original bill sponsor called this a “clarification bill” during his testimony last General Assembly. We are clarifying for school districts that faith based organizations are to be treated the same as secular organizations. They are to be treated equally, and that includes having the same access to school facilities.

Current law already prohibits a school district’s Board of Education from promoting a specific religion, or prohibiting any student from exercising his or her religious beliefs. This legislation removes the section of law allowing a school district to limit religious expression to lunch or other non-instructional time.

The final piece of this legislation prohibits public schools from restricting a student from religious expression in their homework, artwork, or other verbal or written assignments. The student may not be penalized or rewarded for the religious beliefs they express, but the same academic standards, based on substance and relevance, still apply.

Chair and Committee, the extent to which individuals may engage in religious expression in a school setting, can be unclear and House Bill 428 seeks to address this issue through the language I described above. Thank you again for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony. Representative Ginter and I will be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

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