



November 19, 2018

Senator Peggy Lehner  
Senate Building  
1 Capitol Square, 1st Floor  
Columbus, Ohio

Dear Senator Lehner:

I write to urge passage of H.B. 428, the “Ohio Student Religious Liberties Act of 2018.” As the courts and the federal Department of Education have affirmed, while public schools may not engage in religious indoctrination, neither may they be made into religion-free zones.

Among other steps, in 1984 Congress passed the Equal Access Act to provide that when public schools allow some kind of nonreligious student group to meet, they must also allow student-led religious groups to meet.

And yet, as media stories and religious freedom legal organizations often report, it is not uncommon for public schools to claim that the Constitution’s requirement of the separation of church and state obligates them to prevent student religious clubs and other student religious expression, even though other forms of expression are permitted.

Such actions, in addition to being unlawful, are harmful to students, many of whom are religious. Students should learn, in public schools and elsewhere, that their convictions, whether religious or not, are protected under the US and Ohio Constitutions, and that in our system of ordered freedom, they have the right to gather as religious students and to make religious arguments, just as other students have the right to gather and to make philosophical or political arguments.

Ohio and the United States need engaged and respectful citizens; how better to cultivate them than to ensure the rights of religious, as well as nonreligious, students in public schools?

At the urging of Ohio colleagues, I have read the Ohio Legislative Service Commission’s analysis of H.B. 428, and I have heard about instances where Ohio public schools have not maintained an environment hospitable to student religious clubs and expression.

H.B. 428 will correct these mistakes and help to ensure the legitimate freedoms of Ohio students. I urge the Senate to consider and adopt H.B. 428.

Thank you for your leadership in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stanley Carlson-Thies".

Stanley Carlson-Thies  
Founder and Senior Director