

88th House District
Seneca and Sandusky County



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Committees
Civil Justice
Infrastructure and Rural
Development
Primary and Secondary Education

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Chair Bird, Vice Char Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 445, a necessary bill to safeguard parental rights and religious liberty in Ohio.

ORC Section 3313.6022(B) currently states “A school district board of education may adopt a policy that authorizes a student to be excused from school to attend a released time course in religious instruction, provided that each of the following applies:”

This is consistent with language in Ohio’s Constitution which can be traced back to the Northwest Ordinance. I trust that many of you, like me, take time to read the plaques that we pass by regularly as we walk past the statehouse museum. It is there that we can easily and frequently read this language that has been fundamental to all five versions of the Ohio Constitution.

“Religion and morality being necessary to good government, schools shall be established.”

The correlation between religious instruction, schools, and good government are embedded in our constitution. You will notice that HB 445 does not establish which religion but merely acknowledges the opportunity for religious instruction. This opportunity is open to all faiths. HB 445 strengthens Section 3313.6022(B) which is a reflection of this constitutional principle.

As parents began taking advantage of this opportunity, Joel Penton began to organize and create an efficient model that provided training for instructors, character-based bible curriculum, and a platform that is reliable and reputable for participating schools. LIFEWISE Academy was founded in 2019 and as of this fall, they will be serving nearly 200 schools in multiple states.

While this opportunity is not limited to LIFEWISE, they have formulated the model program for release time for religious instruction. I’d like to share some bullet points that highlight the success of their program as they operate under the law.

1. Parental Direction – No child participates without their parent’s express written permission. Parents are the ultimate authority over their children and have both legal and moral authority to direct their education academically, spiritually, and morally.
2. Off Campus Instruction – Students are transported off campus, usually to a nearby church, for religious instruction. No school faculty or staff provide religious instruction.
3. Students may not miss core classes to participate.

4. Hundreds of schools have found a way to accommodate the wishes of thousands of parents who wish their children to receive religious instruction during the school day.
5. Studies demonstrate that accommodating release time for religious instruction has improved, rather than hindered, academic success of participating students.
 - a. Attendance improves.
 - b. Student Behavior improves.
 - c. In school suspensions decline.
 - d. Out of school suspensions decline.
 - e. The overall academic environment improves.

Not only is release time for religious education constitutionally and legally sound, as decided by the United States Supreme Court in *Zorach v. Clausen* (1952) but it is academically profitable wherever it is put into practice.

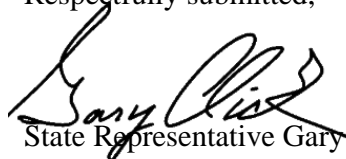
We are here today to improve on a good provision in Ohio Law. While many schools have taken advantage of the permissive language of the law, some school boards have been less accommodating. Regardless of their intentions, their failure to implement a sound policy in this matter results in a denial of both the students' and parents' constitutional right to the free exercise of religion. It is inappropriate to have a patchwork of religious freedom within Ohio based on the whims of our 611 school districts. HB 445 creates a level playing field and equal opportunity for all parents and students throughout Ohio.

Parents have the natural right to direct their child's education including their religious education. Therefore, House Bill 445 requires schools to adopt a nondiscriminatory policy, consistent with federal law that respects the wishes of parents to have their children participate in release time for religious education.

House Bill 445 strengthens ORC Section 3313.6022(B) by changing the word "may" to "shall." The ORC should not simply grant permission to respect our citizens' rights but rather require that they do. It is not the role of a school board to grant or deny citizens their rights. Their role should simply be to determine the policy and procedures that best accommodate those rights.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for family's rights via House Bill 445. Representative Cutrona and I would be happy to take your questions.

Respectfully submitted,


State Representative Gary Click
Ohio House District 88

