

May 29, 2024

Dear Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 445. My name is Adam Burkey and I am from Licking County.

As a born and raised resident of Alexandria, Ohio, with my kids attending Northridge Local School District, I would like to have the choice to enroll my children in Release Time Religious Instruction. Thankfully, the current board of Education at Northridge agrees, and we have Lifewise busing the kids to and from Biblical Character Education classes once a week. Parents and kids alike are excited about it. I am on the board of Lifewise-Northridge and have bussed kids back and forth and attended their classes, and sang with and prayed for them on the bus. It's fun, and kids learn solid truths from the Bible that don't change with the administrations in government. Topics like love, integrity, patience, joy, kindness, understanding, etc. are not only taught but lived out in the RTRI experience. Where public school teachers are stretched thin with so many obligations, we hope to have the choice to enroll our kids in something that kids look forward to and builds their character. There is a huge desire for RTRI. We had over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the kids signed up in the first semester at Lifewise-Northridge. Parents and kids love it, and ought to have the right to choose it.

On the other hand, our neighboring school district, Johnstown Monroe, has more than 750 people on the Lifewise community interest list. We started Northridge's Lifewise with 150 names on our interest list for comparison. They have similar enrollments, Johnstown 774 and Northridge has 550 children in their elementary schools. Yet Johnstown's board of Education has removed the right for parents to have release time religious education by removing the option off their district's bylaws. The current Ohio law wording makes that possible. That's why we need the House Bill 445 to pass. There have been multiple public board meetings at Johnstown with over 100 RTRI supporters in attendance (nearly unanimous room), and yet the board and superintendent voted to remove the RTRI availability, right before the program was ready to start.

RTRI doesn't cost the school. It works within the school's scheduling, and seeks to serve the school and kids. I don't think anyone feels the schools have enough manpower to keep anything beyond the basic learning programs going. When the community overwhelmingly wants to help and provide additional learning for kids of a type which is specified in accepted RTRI law, it should not be allowed for a few people on a board to deny them the right to offer it during school time. Please pass the House Bill 445.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for House Bill 445.

Sincerely, Adam Burkey