

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 Stephen R. Moore and I am from Licking County.

Below are some reasons why this bill is so important.

1. Public school parents increasingly want released time religious courses for their children.
 - a. A 2024 national poll by RMG Research found that 76% of voters favor teaching public school students moral and character education.
 - b. In the last several years, there have been movements led by parents in hundreds of school districts to establish released time programs. As an example, LifeWise Academy, a grassroots-driven program born out of Ohio, will be serving nearly 200 school districts this fall.
 - c. Some school districts have been denying parents access to released time programs. As an example, Johnstown-Monroe had a released time policy in their manual and then abruptly rescinded the policy after hearing from a group of parents who wanted to start a released time program.
2. Released time religious courses have a measurable positive impact on students and schools.
 - a. Decades of research have shown the positive impact of religious instruction on student behavior, academics and mental health.
 - b. A recent independent study <https://lifewise.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/LifeWise-Outcomes-Report-2023-2.pdf> of schools served by LifeWise Academy conducted by Thomas P. Miller & Associates found several including improved attendance and behavior.
3. Giving parents the ultimate choice is the right thing to do.
 - a. Parents know what is best for their children. They should get to decide whether to include religious education in their student's schedule.
 - b. Many parents are not in a position to utilize religious private school or homeschool options. Released time makes religious education available to those who otherwise don't have access.

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

Sincerely,

Stephen R. Moore