

Zachary Vorst

Ohio House of Representatives
Primary and Secondary Education Committee

Dear Committee members,

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 Zachary Vorst and I'm from Franklin County.

I'm a father, husband, and member of the Hilliard City Schools Board of Education. I must clarify that I speak on my own behalf and not on behalf of the Board. I'm writing to you today to share my experience and support for HB 445, a bill that would require school districts in Ohio to carry a policy that allows for students to participate in released time for religious instruction.

In 2022 our Hilliard Board of Education voted to approve a policy allowing for released time for religious instruction. I supported this measure as I believe in the value of religious instruction and fully support that it is something that all Ohio students should have access to. Most of the concerns about the policy were regarding logistics and missing course time. I'm happy to report that the program has been functioning very well! There have been no logistical problems and students do not miss class time at all. I'm very proud of how our district has executed upon this policy.

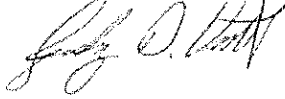
I also have experience with the benefits of this policy as a parent. My two daughters participated in Lifewise Academy courses during the 23-24 school year. My girls have had a tremendously positive experience with Lifewise, as have several other Lifewise parents that I've spoken with. The only complaint I've heard this year was from my youngest daughter, who came home from her first day at Lifewise and mentioned that "It was fun, it was just too short!".

After our Board passed this policy I wrote to over 30 faith leaders, of many faiths, in our district. I notified them of the policy and invited them to research starting their own religious release time program. I hope that the benefits of religious release time are experienced by everyone in our community that practices a religion. It is my sincere hope that religious release time grows and that many other faiths join in.

In closing I hope that our legislature in Ohio can give EVERY student access to this program. I hope that students are not denied this opportunity due to logistical or course time concerns, or by a very vocal minority with an outright loathing of the religious communities in our state. Our students deserve this opportunity, as participating in faith based instruction strengthens our communities. Please vote to pass HB 445 out of committee!

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Zachary D. Vorst". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "Z".

Zachary Vorst