

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 Brenda Jefferson and I am from Franklin County.

HB 445 is imperative to families who wish to have the option of Released Time for Religious Instruction for their children. Parents who seek to incorporate RTRI into their children's education should not have the ability to do so only at the discretion of school administrators. I have attended BOE meetings in my own district to advocate for RTRI, explaining the comprehensive list of reasons to incorporate a RTRI program. Unfortunately, there was very little discussion then and no follow up communication from my districts BOE to even seek to understand. The RTRI policy was rescinded in just one meeting with no further consideration. This is just one example of a BOE who exercised its complete authority to prohibit ALL students access to moral and character education and further eliminate parents' right to choose what is best for their own families.

From a statistical frame of reference, RTRI programs have been shown to offer tremendous positive impact on students' overall behavior, academics, attendance, and mental health. These same opportunities should be afforded to every single child regardless of where they go to school. Religious instructional programs allow students to connect in deeper, more meaningful ways and offers a more wholistic approach to the education and general wellbeing of each student. Sadly, families like my own, are faced with the decision of seeking private education and imposed financial strain because the public district in which we live prohibits Released Time for Religious Instruction. HB 445 would lift this barrier and allow parents the ability to chose what is right for their family.

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

Sincerely, Brenda Jefferson.