

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 Britny Focht and I am from Seneca County.

As someone who is raising children and someone who was once a child raised primarily by a single parent; I have been a witness to the challenge many parents encounter as they balance providing for the physical needs of their children while not neglecting their internal needs. I can also attest to the impact that schools have on character formation and teaching students the skills needed to navigate life not only academically but behaviorally. I have personally found bible education to be crucial in persevering through life's many challenges and have witnessed the transforming power of the word of God to encourage the weary and heal the broken hearted. Many parents are not in a position to utilize religious private school or homeschool options however they should get to decide whether to include religious education in their student's schedule. Released time makes religious education available to those who don't have access.

I currently work as a substitute teacher in four different school districts and I am a mother of three boys ages 4, 6 and 9. I see the struggles that our youth are facing and their great need for character development. I think collectively many of us can agree that our youth are struggling with their purpose, identity, and internal controls like honesty, self-discipline and respect for others. While setbacks and failures are a part of life, our students are struggling to meet those setbacks with resilience. Released time religious courses have a measurable positive impact on students and schools as decades of research have shown the positive impact of religious instruction on student behavior, academics and mental health. A recent independent study of schools served by LifeWise Academy conducted by Thomas P. Miller & Associates found several including improved attendance and behavior.

Public school parents increasingly want released time religious courses for their children. A 2024 national poll by RMG Research found that 76% of voters favor teaching public school students moral and character education. 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. Christian education can help to create a more just and compassionate society as students consider the implications of their actions. It can also help to promote values such as respect, kindness, and forgiveness which are essential for building strong and healthy communities.

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

Respectfully,
Britny Focht

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