

FROM THE DESK OF
MARY DOLCE

May 30, 2024

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

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 Mary Dolce and I reside in Richland County. I currently hold the position of Director for a LifeWise program in Ashland, Ohio

I have had the unique opportunity to be a part of the whole process in witnessing the benefits of released time religious instruction in our community. In serving as Director, I have worked with parents, administrators and community members collectively toward a goal of providing character training with a Biblical perspective with the desire to serve our schools.

In the past two years we have had this program, I can attest to many reasons to support HB 445 to all communities in Ohio. I want to strongly advocate the incorporation of RTRI programs in all communities.

One purpose of my writing in support of House Bill 445 is based on recent research and also the significant impact I have personally witnessed in our community. Furthermore, released time religious instruction is sought after by both parents of students in our area and local administration as stated previously.

Secondly, LifeWise Academy in particular comes alongside administrators and teachers as a supportive ally in their mission to serve students, schools and communities. Studies and surveys show that LifeWise programs improve student behavior and that educators agree LifeWise benefits their students.

Thirdly, research has shown the positive impact of religious instruction on student behavior, academics and mental health. With rising incidents of depression, anxiety and suicide, programs such as LifeWise, helps to engage students in healthy conversations regarding character and hope inside the classroom, at home and within the community.

Parents also overwhelmingly recommend LifeWise to other parents. Parents know what is best for their children. I believe they should be allowed to decide whether to include religious education in their student's schedule. Most parents are not in a position to

utilize religious private school or homeschool options as a choice. Released time makes religious education available to these families.

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

Sincerely,

Mary Dolce