

May 30, 2024

To Whom it May Concern,

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 testament on House Bill 445. My name is Melissa Wise, and I am from Seneca County.

Ohio parents sending their children to public school should have the right to choose whether they would like to enroll their child in a released religious time program. The choice should not fall into the hands of our Administrators. In Seneca County, we have had seven superintendents in the last ten years. That being said, voters and parents have lost confidence in the School Board and Administration's ability to rightfully make sound decisions on behalf of our children and community. Parents know what is best for their children and they should ultimately get to decide whether to include religious education in their student's curriculum.

Many parents do not have the means financially or the time to transport their student to a religious program before or after school, nor do children with full academic and/or athletic schedules, have additional time in their day to attend said programs. Recent studies have shown a positive impact of religious instruction in student's behavior, academics, and mental health. A recent independent study of schools served by LifeWise Academy conducted by Thomas P. Miller & Associates found several positive measures including improved attendance and behavior among students. Fremont and Findlay schools, which are located in surrounding counties to Tiffin City Schools have already implemented a LifeWise program and are seeing a positive impact. Our community in Seneca County has obtained enough signatures showing support of a LifeWise religious program in Tiffin City Schools.

We ask that you please help us strengthen the parent's voice by taking away the option for the school board to deny our children this valuable educational program during the school day. Many children are already required to attend special classes such as art, gym, band, choir, or study hall that they may not necessarily be interested in, so why not allow a religious program as an alternative option. Some high schools are even offering a religious time release program as an elective.

The decision made on this bill will directly impact thousands of children across the state and I have full confidence that the parties involved will do everything in their power to make the right decision and advocate on behalf of students and parents in Ohio. The best tools and gifts we can give our children by allowing them access to biblical education will lay the foundation for their future endeavors, relationships, and success.

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

Respectfully,

Melissa Wise