

May 30, 2024

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 Philip Braisted and I am from Stark County.

Our public schools have many significant challenges in providing a well-rounded educational experience for the students they serve. According to a recent survey by a group called Global Youth Culture and reported on the web site of an organization called One Hope, 60% of teens report having experienced a serious depression over the past 3 months – 75% reported feelings of loneliness and 35% reported having had suicidal thoughts. These are sobering statistics – and the numbers seem to be getting worse every year. In a study that was published in the Journal of Political Economy in June of 2019 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6613944/>), the researchers found that adolescents who were “religious” had a significantly lower incidence of depression. In other words, religious training can be a powerful tool in helping to address this plague that is threatening our children.

Declining attendance has also been a major problem for most schools in Ohio – and in a rigorous study completed by the Lifewise Program (a religious education program that is offered in some schools here in Ohio) they found that when students participated in the Lifewise program, the schools saw an improvement in their attendance rates (for every 10% of the student population involved in Lifewise, school attendance rates improved by almost 7%). Equally importantly, in the second and third years of Lifewise participation, schools saw a decrease in the incidence of in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

I think you would agree that these are positive outcomes that would be beneficial for all of the schools and students in our State. Please pass this bill to encourage educators in the use of this tool of religious education to help them succeed in their difficult task of preparing our children for a healthy and successful future.

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

Sincerely,

Philip Braisted