

Written Testimony Against HB 445 (Released Time Instruction)

Kari A. Sommers

2188 Oak Tree Dr NW

Dover, Ohio 44622

House Bill 445 is dangerous for our schools and students. It makes no requirements for religious institutions taking children out of school to require background checks (like those that every person who interacts with students in a public school are required to pass). This will result in sexual predators gaining access to children during the school day with no one there to prevent it.

How do we know this? Because it has already happened. LifeWise Academy, which is probably the biggest released time instruction organization advocating for this bill, has hired at least one sexual predator for their program within the last six months. [Renee Beck](#), who was hired to be the director of the LifeWise program at Firelands Local School District, was fired in 2018 from Loudonville-Perrysville Exempted Village School District for sexting with minor students. LifeWise has actually used so-called [background check services](#), first Protect My Ministry and then ProScreening Background Checks, but whichever of these services they used at that time did not catch her reason for dismissal from Loudonville-Perry Exempted Village School District. This is because background checks like these are really just consumer reports about people. They do not comprehensively check for offenses like Ohio BCI and FBI background checks; they only check in the area the applicant specifies.

What is most disturbing about House Bill 445 is that it does not require even the insufficient background check that LifeWise already does. It makes no requirement of background checks for released time for religious instruction institutions at all. At the same time, it protects school districts from lawsuits. While I believe that the vast majority of public school staff will do everything possible to protect children, not requiring background checks while freeing schools from all liability opens the door to school policies simply allowing any religious institution to come in and pick up public school kids for instruction in an offsite location with no checks in place whatsoever that the people picking up and teaching the kids are safe for our children.

House Bill 445 is dangerous to children and should not be passed out of committee.