

November 10, 2024

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Committee:

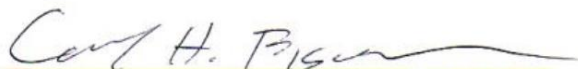
I am writing to you today in my capacity as a concerned citizen and elected School Board Member representing Beavercreek City Schools in Greene County. Note that my statements are my own and do not necessarily represent the position of our local board. I strongly oppose HB 445, which mandates schools to allow release time for religious education (RTRI).

This bill undermines the autonomy of our local schools and imposes yet another unnecessary mandate from the state. Presently, our district policy allows RTRI, and it is used appropriately by several students to further their *personal religious education* in ways that do not interfere with the rights and education of other students. However, not all RTRI programs are respectful of the religious observances of non-participating students. Many concerned residents have contacted me, worried that their elementary age children will be subjected to evangelism *during school hours* from their peers as certain RTRI programs are advocating, training, and instructing. HB 445 would prevent our local district from reevaluating our RTRI policies if they become exploited to undermine the separation of church and state and disrupt the educational environment for all students.

The importance of preserving local control over our schools cannot be overstated. ***Our community knows best*** how to address the unique needs of our students, and state-imposed mandates like HB 445 only serve to complicate and hinder our efforts to serve our community. Public schools are already over-regulated in Ohio. We should be in the process of removing unnecessary mandates, not adding more and diverting valuable resources and attention away from core educational priorities.

I urge you and your colleagues to vote against HB 445. Protecting the integrity of our public education system and ensuring that local communities retain control over their schools is paramount. Thank you for considering my perspective on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carl H. Fischer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a thin yellow horizontal line.

Carl H. Fischer