

**Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445**  
**Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**November 11, 2024**  
**Nicole L Stafford**

Chair Gayle Manning, Vice Chair Sarah Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Phillip M. Robinson, Jr., and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee,  
Thank you for reading my testimony today. My name is Nicole Stafford (she/her). I am a parent of children that will directly be affected by this change. I am testifying in opposition to House Bill 445, which seeks to alter the well-established system of Released Time Religious Instruction (RTRI) by changing the permissive “may” to “shall” in Section [3313.6022](#) of the Ohio Revised Code. I believe this unnecessary bill threatens the autonomy of local school boards and undermines constitutional principles. I urge you to oppose this legislation for several key reasons:

Our country was founded with the promise of separation of church and state. While 68% of Americans identify as Christian, the rest do not. I do not support religious indoctrination of any kind. School hours are meant for subjects that will support and sustain success in a child’s future. Religious education should remain in Christian schools. Parents should have the choice to send their children to those schools if they wish to raise their children in that religious practice. Children should not be forced to learn about a religion that doesn’t align with their beliefs.

For the past decade, RTRI programs have operated without significant issues under the current law. This balanced approach has allowed parents who wish for their children to participate in religious instruction the opportunity to do so while maintaining the integrity of public education. There is no evidence of systemic issues requiring legislative correction. The success of the existing RTRI framework demonstrates that the proposed changes are unnecessary, which is evident by the fact that according to [School Ministries Ohio](#), over 60% of all districts have a policy.

In summary, HB 445 is an unnecessary and potentially harmful piece of legislation. It threatens local control, violates constitutional principles, and risks undermining the quality of education in Ohio’s public schools. I urge you to protect the integrity of our education system and oppose HB 445. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.