

Esteemed committee members,

The current proposal to amend section 3313.6022 with the word “shall” in place of the word “may” will have detrimental consequences for Ohio’s public schools. It is not in the best interest of our students or our teachers to have student released during the day for such programs. It is a distraction from the purpose of public education. Teacher’s in our state are already running with less than adequate resources. Regularly pulling from their time (yes, lunch, recess, and study hall included) for non-curriculum activities does not benefit our students. Additional transitions, especially for younger students, are time consuming and disruptive. Our focus for the school day should be on improve educational outcomes, not religious instruction that is not part of the state curriculum. What if instead of putting our energy into this policy change, we were working on reforming the structure of school funding that was ruled unconstitutional back in **1997**. That would support our teachers and educational goals more than a mandatory RTRI policy.

There are plenty of options for parents to choose from for religious education outside of school hours. If those do not fit into their schedules, then they should be reevaluating their priorities. I would also like to point out that at the moment, a singular organization is the primary one seeking to take advantage of this release policy. It’s important to ask why is that one particular organization is seeking to disrupt the school day. What benefit are they receiving and what further changes will they seek once they have access to our students? Other religious organizations see the value in well-educated congregation members and do not seek to pull students during the school day.

It should also be pointed out that the environment being created for those who don’t participate is problematic. These students are being subject to isolation, ridicule, and solicitation by their peers (in the classroom, during the school day). No child should be made to feel less than for their religious beliefs, or lack thereof, especially our youngest and most vulnerable populations. Moreover many of these students are too young to differentiate between what happens on and off of school grounds during school hours. It is extremely problematic for students to think what happens at an offsite religious program is part of their school day and public school education. Public schools are meant to be places free from religious indoctrination. Allowing organizations to use paid time for their own purposes goes against the separation of church and state.

Please do not allow Ohio public schools to become entangled with religion. Keep the policy as is and the decision-making power in the hands of our local school boards.

Thank you,
Lindsey Borstein
Akron, Ohio