

11/11/24- HB 445

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler, and Ranking Member Robinson,

I am a substitute teacher. I teach across many central Ohio public school districts and grade levels. Our teachers and Administrators are struggling. They are scared, and leaving the vocation in higher numbers than those coming into the profession. It is bills like this that have them scared. I know this. I've heard it in teacher lounges and offices everywhere.

I believe it is the job of the State and the Education Committee specifically to do everything they can to shore up our public schools and support our public school boards, teachers and administrators so that they have the authority and power as local elected officials to do what they were elected to do- support ALL public school children and to keep them safe from outside influences that do not align with their oaths of office. Please don't hamstring them. You will see that the current policy is working. Some districts have elected to allow release time for religious instruction, and some have not- its according to the needs and conditions that are unique to their districts. That is why there are LOCAL school boards and public schools are not under the total control of the State.

Please see RTRI as it was intended- a way to accommodate the non-christian students and their families who did not and do not observe the christian holidays (Christmas, Easter, etc). It was passed to allow PARENTS or trusted caregivers to sign their kids out for things like catechism, bat mitzvah or other holy days that they observe. It is fair and it is working. I have spoken to education attorneys, constitutional scholars and parents. This is not about LifeWise Academy. They are merely a symptom of an underlying issue and that is the belief of a few that public education ought to be privatized and that their particular brand of religion is "character education". All you have to do is consider that the founder of LifeWise's book is called DURING SCHOOL HOURS. Please trust me when I say that a few people, meeting in a church basement with VERY good funding, do not represent the majority and have too big of a seat at the table.

Please look at the bigger picture here. We know organizations such as LifeWise are DIRECTLY tied to Project 2025. They either contribute financially to MANY of these organizations or receive funding from them, including many organizations on the list of the Southern Poverty Law Center as recognized hate groups.

Please think about the bigger picture being sold as "school choice" and what choices kids in rural districts have or what real choices the underprivileged have when competition will make the very few private schools (that don't outperform public schools in over 90% of the districts where both operate) out of reach for most families.

From every part of my being, I hope and pray (yes pray) that you will vote with your conscience and recite your oath of office in your head before doing so.

I respect the job that you do, it can't be easy, and I thank you for doing more than just talking the talk. You are walking the walk.

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