

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

**Peter Falzarano**

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 allowing me to testify. My name is Peter Falzarano (he/him/his). I am a parent of a child in the Marysville Exempted Village School District, an educator at Ohio State University in Columbus, and have been extensively involved in my child's schooling. Our Marysville community is struggling as a result of a failed school levy measure on the November 5 ballot, and I am concerned this bill, if passed, will continue to fracture our community. I am writing to express my opposition to [HB 445](#), which seeks to alter the well-established system of Released Time for 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.

Growing up, I was raised with religious principles. I attended a Catholic K-8 school, went to Mass each Sunday, received First Communion and Confirmation, and experienced all the pomp and circumstance of a religious education. While I do not regularly practice now as I have grown to see significant disconnects between what the Catholic Church preaches and my own ideologies, I understand the importance of religion in society. I see how driven those people of faith are and the unique perspective it brings to their decision-making. Interestingly, my schooling also taught me about the *separation of church and state*, which it seems as if is regularly forgotten, overlooked, or simply ignored in our communities lately.

Religious programs can operate disruption-free in either a before- or after-school fashion or on the weekends. With a spouse working in the district, I see daily how disruptive even the simplest anomalies can be to a child's education. In our district, with the failed levy and the elimination/reduction of the arts and other non-core programs, requiring yet another disruption to the school day will be devastating. Children are habitual entities driven by routine; the child psychology literature supports this finding.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bridley, A., & Jordan, S. S. (2012). Child Routines Moderate Daily Hassles and Children's Psychological Adjustment. *Children's Health Care*, 41(2), 129–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02739615.2012.657040>

<sup>2</sup> Lixin Ren, Courtney Boise, Rebecca Y.M. Cheung (2022). Consistent routines matter: Child routines mediated the association between interparental functioning and school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 61, 145–157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.07.002>.

<sup>3</sup> Sytsma, S. E., Kelley, M. L., & Wymer, J. H. (2001). Development and initial validation of the child routines inventory. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 23, 241-251.

When Section 3313.6022 was codified into law in 2014, the 130th General Assembly wisely chose the language “may” instead of “shall” to give local school boards discretion in permitting RTRI. The permissive language was designed to respect the diverse needs and views of individual communities. This flexible approach allows locally elected school boards to decide what is in the best interest of their students and administration while not mandating schools to accommodate a forced implementation of religious instruction. The current language of the law also reflects the judiciary’s preference for protecting local governance from unnecessary state interference.

Please consider my testimony and oppose H.B. 445. Please leave important decisions about when to adopt policy to the local school boards.