

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

**Mary Mitton-Sanchez**  
**Ohio Resident, Voter, and Parent**

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 Mary Mitton-Sanchez (she/her). I am a stay-at-home parent to three children in the Westerville City School District. I am a former high school educator and part-time employee for a state educational organization. I am writing to express my opposition to HB 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:

Ohio is lucky to have a vibrant, diverse student population to serve. To remove students for a religious club, which could easily be held outside of school hours, chips away at the separation of church and state that is paramount in American public schools and creates the potential for students who have a different faith to feel ostracized or uninvited. Our educators work SO HARD to cultivate relationships and school community, and our policies should support those community and camaraderie building efforts. Requiring that schools have RTRI policies has the potential to disrupt these efforts and leave our students of different religions vulnerable to bullying or harassment.

I implore our lawmakers to stick with the current language in our laws. H.B. 445 is too overarching and creates the potential for too many issues in Ohio’s schools with our most precious of resources. It’s not worth the immense safety, learning, and logistical risks and issues that are posed by requiring an RTRI policy in each district. Please, allow local control and allow districts to decide what works best for them.

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.