

Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445
Primary and Secondary Education Committee
November 10, 2024

Laura N. Lankford

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 [insert your full name and pronouns]. I am a [insert the perspective you bring to the testimony/your role in your community and where you work/live]. 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:

I believe very strongly in the separation of church and state. I believe that the diversity of our public schools and communities is of utmost importance and that introducing any one religion, even if it is off school grounds and with an outside entity, has a great potential to be divisive among the students and communities. School days are meant for all the students to learn collectively, not separately and by a specific religious faith. There is plenty of time outside of school for those teachings to happen that would not lead to disruption in the school day or students feeling left out or marginalized. I feel that these decisions should be left as a choice and left up to each school district to decide what is best for their own community.

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.

Thank you,

Laura Lankford, Ohio Resident, 44333