

In Opposition to the proposed Bill- HB445

Regards school policies for release for religious instruction

My sincerest gratitude to the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee for allowing me to address you.

My name is Katherine Schwanitz. I am originally from Columbus and graduated from Upper Arlington High School. I live now in a small town on a great lake in Vermilion, Ohio where I am a Girl Scout Leader of Troop 50270, active community volunteer, and archery instructor. I am a recruitment coordinator with an international company. Finally, I am a Mother who has enriched her seventh graders in literature, history, and STEM giving them a love of learning.

I love Ohio and have spent almost all of my 46 years of life within its borders. I love the Ledges and our Lake. I love climbing our hills and have gotten lost in the beauty of both fields and forests. This land is a great land filled with opportunity and exploration, something Ohio is known for with whom we have exported to the world. Presidents, Astronauts, Creators. They have in common that they went to our public schools. Schools like Poland and New Concord.

Public education is what overwhelmingly creates the new leaders in America. In Vermilion, our school board reviewed carefully what LifeWise Academy presented and said a resounding NO to it after repeated efforts for transparency and accommodation.

It's important for a community to have this mechanism, where our school boards decide what is right for our community. They are the elected officials that we the people selected. People we put there to guard the interests of our LOCAL community. Each community is different. For some, religious instruction time during the school day fits. For other schools, the day would greatly be disturbed. We often hear from the elected officials that they want choice- medical freedom, school freedom, as well as free speech. Preserving choice, the ability to choose what's best for each community is a key freedom that would be lost if the change was made from "MAY" to "SHALL" with HB445.

A freedom to say no.

When Vermilion said no, it said "no" not to be hostile to religion but to preserve and respect how our school is set up. There's no room in the tight school day for groups to come take kids out. The educational program uses every minute- including lunch and recess to

promote unity and togetherness- disruptions where it becomes US vs THEM is not allowable.

Let us also consider the future influx of groups pending to enter RTRI- a group that meets the criteria in the law and with parental permission takes kids out of school and teaches them to cause issues, bullying, and disruption. Without being able to rescind the policy- this disruption would continue unabated because they have the right to take the kids out, without penalty for any religious program. There's nothing in the law that prevents this situation. Just something to consider before taking away the school board's power to protect their schools. We do not need our schools to become battlegrounds with different groups preying on our kids.

In conclusion, every community is different. For some, the current RTRI programs are not a burden to their school district. I'm glad they have a choice. Let's preserve that. Please do not vote against choice or against our school boards, which are on the ground level of our communities and can act when the need is there. We need them to be that final wall or bridge when it comes to our kids—our greatest treasure.

I thank the Committee for their time.