

11/10/24

Dear Representative Gale Manning,

My name is Suzanne Riska and I am writing to you today in opposition of HB 445. I live in Westerville, Ohio with my husband and our two children who attend Westerville City Schools. I am very concerned about the negative impact HB 445 could have on our community and our schools if it were to pass.

My first concern is for the teachers of our students. Our teachers in Westerville are amazing. My daughter is in third grade, and when I think of all that her teachers have done for her and how much they care about her and her education, it brings tears to my eyes. My son is in kindergarten and his experience has also been wonderful. Both of my kids have IEPs and have required extra help in different areas. The time our teachers have with our kids to provide instruction is precious and should be protected. And what about the additional workload that will come to both teachers and school staff if multiple religious organizations are pulling students from school during the day? Will our schools be financially compensated for the burden that will come with passing HB 445? These are things that must be considered.

In Westerville we are so proud of our diverse community and we welcome those from all walks of life. All of the religious organizations in our community offer religious instruction on the weekends and often after school, so it is unnecessary for students to be pulled from the school day in order to receive religious instruction. Public school should be a neutral space. That does not mean students, staff, and teachers cannot express themselves or practice their religions, but instruction and recruitment should not take place during school hours.

It should be left to our elected local school boards to make the call on what is right for each of our communities. We elect them for this reason. Please vote against HB 445.

Thank you so much for your time,
Suzanne Riska