

Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445
Primary and Secondary Education Committee
November 12, 2024

Lisa Sabol

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 reading my statement. My name is Lisa Sabol and I am testifying in opposition to House Bill 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.

My opposition comes with my concern that the primary motivation for HB 445 seems to be for nothing more than accommodating the interests of [LifeWise Academy](#), a private religious organization. Allowing a private entity to influence state legislation and public school governance sets a dangerous precedent. It raises significant concerns about the undue influence of corporate interests on public education policy. LifeWise Academy and its leadership has been very open about directly pressuring legislators to change state law, not only in Ohio, but every state in the nation. They have already successfully persuaded lawmakers to adopt a “may to shall” language change in [Indiana](#) and Oklahoma. In his book “During School Hours” the CEO of LifeWise Academy said he had “one clear thought” about RTRI which was “We have to ‘McDonalds’ this thing.” The state doesn’t mandate requirements to municipalities that force them to have a McDonalds, why would they do it with religious education?

School Ministries Ohio has been “training Ohio leaders to offer Released Time Bible Education” for almost 20 years, “and in 2014 [...] took the lead to educate Ohio’s legislature” and credits themselves with helping not only pass, but in fact writing the current RTRI law. However they did not submit proponent testimony or publicly speak out in support of HB 445. Their silence on this proposed legislation is another factor that strongly reiterates the idea that this is being pushed by and solely for LifeWise Academy specifically.

I ask that you consider my testimony and vote “no” on H.B. 445 because while we should continue to allow local school boards of education to adopt RTRI policies, we should not require them to adopt RTRI policies for the benefit of private entities that are attempting to gain influence.

Thank you,

Lisa Sabol