

## **Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445**

### **Primary and Secondary Education Committee**

**November 9, 2024**

#### **Deborah Thompson**

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 testimony today. My name is Deborah Thompson. I am a retired educator and live with my husband in Berea. 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. The revision removes the decision-making power from local communities and school districts. The policy has worked well for ten years and there is no evidence that it needs to be a requirement.

A specific example of how the process is being usurped is in Berea. Several months ago, three individuals met with the superintendent and provided a list of names, not signatures, of people who wanted a specific organization to begin an RTRI program.

After record requests were made and reviews of the information, it was determined that none of the three who met with the superintendent live in any of the three cities that comprise the Berea school district. In addition, of those on the list, less than 20% are residents, and very few are parents. The vast majority are over 65. Some of the people who allegedly signed lived over 140 miles away. Lastly, the three nonresidents mentioned were affiliated with churches who are promoting the program. This is a direct conflict of interest.

The parents, families, community members and taxpayers of the district are not the ones asking for this program to be implemented. And it is their children who will be affected by school day disruptions, and the taxpayers expected to pay for duties that staff members will be required to complete that are not in the scope of their assigned duties.

We are a diverse district, and students have been utilizing RTRI for many years. The policy should be for families, not organizations. Consider the chaos that could ensue if multiple organizations requested release time.

I urge you to reconsider Bill 445 as this should be a local decision by school boards who know their constituents. Also, please consider revising the language so the intended outcome to provide for individualized religious instruction is for children of families, not organizations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Deborah Thompson  
Berea

