

**Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445**  
**Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**November 11, 2024**

**April N. Williams**

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 April N. Williams. I am a mother of 2 and an active volunteer with various school activities. 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. 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:

As a lifelong committed resident of Ohio, and as someone deeply involved in local education and community activities through various roles, I am concerned about the precedent this legislation would set. Mandating schools to adopt policies for released time for religious instruction shifts the discretionary power from local school boards, who best understand the diverse needs of their students, to a state-level imposition. This change could complicate school operations and disrupt educational priorities.

Additionally, I am concerned about the inclusivity and fairness within our school systems. The mandatory nature of this bill could pressure schools to accommodate specific religious programs, potentially creating tension among students of different faiths and those who do not practice a religion at all. The autonomy to decide such policies should remain at the local level to respect community-specific beliefs and ensure no child feels marginalized or compelled into a program that may not align with their family's beliefs.

Furthermore, as a parent actively engaged in supporting children's activities and fostering inclusive environments, I am worried about the message this bill sends regarding the prioritization of religious over secular educational content during school hours. Schools should remain focused on providing comprehensive, unbiased education. Creating requirements that could favor one kind of instruction over others risks diminishing this objective, impacting trust in the public education system and potentially diverting resources or attention from core academic and extracurricular programs.

For communities like mine, which value the coexistence of various beliefs and mutual respect, HB 445 risks unsettling this balance. Such a shift could also pose challenges for families navigating different views on religious instruction, complicating their relationship with the

schools that are meant to serve them equally.

For the past decade, RTRI programs have operated without significant issues under the current law. This balanced approach has allowed parents who wish for their children to participate in religious instruction the opportunity to do so while maintaining the integrity of public education. There is no evidence of systemic issues requiring legislative correction. The success of the existing RTRI framework demonstrates that the proposed changes are unnecessary, which is evident by the fact that according to [School Ministries Ohio](#), over 60% of all districts have a policy.

In summary, HB 445 is an unnecessary and potentially harmful piece of legislation. It threatens local control, violates constitutional principles, and risks undermining the quality of education in Ohio's public schools. I urge you to protect the integrity of our education system and oppose HB 445. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.