

**Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445
Primary and Secondary Education Committee**

**November 10, 2024
Rev. Dr. Kay Mooney Cox**

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 allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Kay Mooney Cox [she/her]. I am a concerned citizen. I have a Ph.D. in theology, have taught college religion courses, and have served twenty-six years as an ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ. I am testifying in opposition to House Bill 445, which seeks to alter the system of Released Time Religious Instruction (RTRI) by changing the permissive “may” to “shall” in Section 3313.6022 of the Ohio Revised Code.

When my husband, Captain John Cox, USN, was commanding officer of the U.S. Submarine Base, New London, CT, the base chapel was used by various religious groups. When the WICCA organization requested to worship in the chapel, he decided not to let them on the basis that it would not have been “conducive to good order and discipline.” The WICCA was a self-proclaimed organization of witches, who liked to worship “skyclad” (naked). That was where he drew the line.

Where do school boards draw the line on which organizations can conduct Released Time Religious Instruction in public schools? LifeWise Academy is the organization pressuring legislators to change state law, not only in Ohio, but in every state in the nation. LifeWise Academy instructional material is published by the Southern Baptist Convention. It has a Statement of Faith, to which all teachers must subscribe. Some of the more objectionable beliefs are the Bible is God’s infallible written Word, originally written without error. Man’s original sin brought all mankind under divine condemnation. Man’s nature is corrupted, and he is thus totally unable to please God. At physical death, the unbeliever enters immediately into eternal, conscious separation from the Lord and awaits the resurrection of his body to everlasting judgment and condemnation. Although it is not in their Statement of Faith, Southern Baptists are not accepting of LGBTQ persons nor of female pastors. The Bible is taught in LifeWise as objective history, denying scientific evolution, as taught in public school.

Which other religious organizations can qualify for Released Time Religious Instruction—mainline Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Voodoo, Satanists, WICCA?

HB 445 is an unnecessary and potentially harmful piece of legislation. It 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.

