

Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445

Primary and Secondary Education Committee

November 11, 2024

**Amy Davis
Parent**

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 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 name is Amy Davis (She/Her/Hers). I am a parent of 2 children in elementary school in Central Ohio. I believe this unnecessary bill threatens the autonomy of local school boards. I urge you to oppose this legislation.

I am supportive of anyone who wants to worship anything. There are countless other ways to support students and their families in their individual faiths without impacting teachers, school resources, other students, or learning time. Religious organizations managed to find ways to continue outreach throughout COVID via online streaming. Insisting that school hours are the only hours available for this type of program is disingenuous and reflects poorly on the faith institution that is failing to meet the needs of their congregants at appropriate times. Any before or after school program can and should be accommodated as much as the school board deems reasonable and a reasonable RTRI request for a specific holiday such as Ash Wednesday or Eid should be honored. Creating a whole new “class” within the school day and bribing students to pressure their peers into joining is not reasonable.

Some of my concerns include proselytizing to peers and creating an atmosphere that teachers and students of other faiths or nonfaith have to navigate without being allowed to directly address the topic. The tactics used to recruit kids with “field trip” buses, prizes, candy, and peer pressure are questionably aggressive for adults, and could be considered predatory for kids.

Calling 3rd party volunteers “teachers” confuses young students who can’t differentiate and is stolen valor from actual licensed teachers. When a child tells their parents, “My teacher says you are going to hell” but leaves out the detail that it was an RTRI “teacher” who will field that angry phone call? Even once the truth is figured out, the time and effort from the school staff are expelled and there is erosion of parent/school relations.

When kids return after sugary treats and have “field trip” energy that impacts the next lesson the teacher is starting, if they arrive on time. That affects the entire class, not just those that opt-in.

Big emotions happen if students don’t get to go, or are told they must go. The right and responsibility should remain with the parents to get kids to a religious function, not

teachers. Public schools should remain firm in remaining non-religious during school hours and avoid any overlap that may be perceived as condoning or preferring one franchise or faith.

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 religious institutions by Opposing HB 445.