

11/10/2024

Stephen Scott Zeune

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Greetings Committee Chairperson Gale Manning,

My name is Stephen Scott Zeune and I am the parent of a first grader attending Cherrington Elementary in the Westerville public school district. I am absolutely opposed to HB 445 regarding the RTRI policy. I attended every meeting of the Westerville Public school Board meetings regarding rescinding RTRI and spoke on three of those occasions.

Throughout the meetings, those in favor of Life Wise and RTRI in public schools validated concerns I have had with the program including bullying, discrimination, division, indoctrination, and distraction from education. Speakers in support of Life Wise openly discriminated against a Muslim school board member, acknowledged that they believe everyone should be Christian, and bullied the board by threatening to replace them and vote down their tax levy. As divisive as the meetings were, to believe this division has not already crept into the schools and does not impact children's relationships, actions, judgements, and sense of belonging is just naïve.

Religious instruction, especially when skewed towards one religion has ZERO place in a standard public school day. It is also deeply concerning that programs such as Life Wise operate with little scrutiny as to who can be involved in the program & do not need to publish any of their curriculum for public review. I fear if more programs are allowed to operate under this model, the already alarming distractions, & logistical issues of busing kids to and from schools will only become greater more difficult to manage.

If HB 445 passes, the quality of my childrens' education will suffer. Release time programs will add a significant burden on my school administration and harm my childrens' learning. It is also completely unnecessary to require release time options during the school day when it can easily be provided after school, before school, or on weekends.

Please take my concerns into consideration and vote down HB 445. Religious programs during school time have proved to be divisive, disruptive and distract from the ultimate goal of enriching our children. My district followed the desires of its students' parents and made an informed decision to rescind its Release Time for Religious Instruction, primarily due to logistical concerns. It's time to put an end to unnecessary distractions.

Best Regards,

Stephen Scott Zeune