

**Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445**  
**Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**November 10, 2024**

**Rebecca Leach-Seymour**  
**Resident of Westerville, Ohio and**  
**Parent of a student in Westerville City Schools**

Chair Gayle Manning, Vice Chair Sarah Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Phillip M. Robinson, Jr., and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

My name is Rebecca Leach-Seymour (she/her). I am a resident of Westerville, Ohio and the parent of a 5-year-old who will attend Kindergarten next year in Westerville City Schools. I write to express my opposition to [HB 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.

Each local school system in Ohio is unique. Local school boards are elected from and by the community they serve. They know the families in their school district and best how to serve the diverse needs of their community. The flexibility of the current law allows schools to find an approach that fits the needs of their students, teachers and administration.

The appropriateness of the current law was demonstrated by Westerville City Schools when, in September of this year, the Westerville City Schools Board made the unanimous decision to remove their RTRI policy. This decision was made based on two years of the policy being utilized by Lifewise Academy to remove students from elementary schools during the school day. It also took into consideration testimonies for and against the RTRI policy from local parents, educators, religious leaders and school administrators, which were presented to the board over several months of school board meetings. The Westerville City Schools Board determined that the policy was negatively impacting the school system and rescinded it. HB 445 would undermine this decision made by the Westerville Board of Education.

I urge you to protect local governance and the will of the people who elected them. Leave the decision about whether or not to adopt an RTRI policy with our local school boards. Oppose HB 445.

Please consider my testimony and oppose H.B. 445.