

As a proud public school educator, I must stand in strong opposition of this bill. Our public schools and instructional time are no place for religious instruction. In this bill, it is stated that a student is responsible for any missed school work, how though, can these students be responsible for this work when they would be excused from the lesson necessary to complete the assignments? Public school teachers do not have the time and resources to support students in making up this content. Further, the bill states that students will not miss a “core curriculum subject course” in order to attend religious instruction. How is it that we are quantifying which subjects are important instruction? Art, music, and physical education classes are graded based on state standards just as are reading and math. These teachers already only see students on a weekly basis rather than daily, any unnecessary missed time in these courses is unacceptable. A public school education is designed to meet state learning standards, and every teacher will tell you a phrase we hear nearly every day is this, “every instructional minute counts”. How can we make them count if we lose them to not only the time they would spend in these religious courses, but also the time traveling to and from the location in order to participate? It is clear that in the drafting of this bill, teachers were not consulted.

Beyond the learning loss this bill would cause, it is also a clear violation of the separation of church and state. Students and their families have every right to attend religious gatherings outside of school hours, or even opt for a religious based private school experience if the family believes it to be right for them. Additionally, the school calendar is already set up to accommodate the dominating religion’s holidays and there are provisions in place for excused absences for families whose religious holiday celebrations occur during the traditional school calendar. Public school is no place for a religious agenda.

In the event this bill does pass, despite its clear flaws, how would these programs be regulated? Will their compliance to a published curriculum be mandated? Or will they be able to hide what they're teaching and even engage in lawsuits when their content gets published? If you believe this to be hypothetical, I encourage you to look into Lifewise Academy... a program that would be empowered by this bill. This program sued a volunteer for publishing the curriculum online.

This bill is just one more attempt to undermine public school education and must be treated as such.