

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

Sean Diefenderfer

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 reading my testimony today. My name is Sean Diefenderfer (he/him). I am a single father of four children with their grades ranging from 3rd grade up to 9th. All of my children attend Fairbanks School District in Milford Center, Ohio. Ever since my wife's battle against breast cancer ended in 2022, I have been doing my best to raise my children as respectful, morally-sound individuals. I am testifying 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. I believe this unnecessary bill threatens the autonomy of local school boards and undermines constitutional principles. I urge you to oppose this legislation for several key reasons:

Lifewise is already an active organization in my children's school. Almost daily my children are approached by friends and pressured into joining Lifewise. While I have issues with how this particular organization operates (enticing their students to recruit additional through candy or other gifts, by claiming to be non-denominational but refusing to provide their curriculum). However, I feel removing the option for school districts to create their own guidelines for RTRI, additional, more nefarious programs may enter our schools

For the past decade, RTRI programs have operated without significant issues under the current law. This balanced approach has allowed parents who wish for their children to participate in religious instruction the opportunity to do so while maintaining the integrity of public education. There is no evidence of systemic issues requiring legislative correction. The success of the existing RTRI framework demonstrates that the proposed changes are unnecessary, which is evident by the fact that according to [School Ministries Ohio](#), over 60% of all districts have a policy.

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 oppose HB 445. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.