

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

Alyssa Griffin, Parent, Community Member, and Volunteer
Pickerington/Reynoldsburg, OH

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. My name is Alyssa Griffin (shey/they). I am a scout leader, both Girl Scouts and Scouts BSA, a booster board president for a school lacrosse team, and parent to a child within Ohio who attends a public school. I am testifying in opposition to House Bill 445, 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. I believe this unnecessary bill threatens the autonomy of local school boards. I urge you to oppose this legislation for several key reasons.

Our local school boards are elected by the individuals who live in these areas and we entrust them to provide guidance to our local schools and the government doesn’t need to add further guardrails around things like RTRI when districts may already have a policy in place. Our students do not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate (Tinker vs Des Moines). Among those include our First Amendment which covers the separation of church and state.

School boards and educators are the ones that should be establishing what occurs in our schools, and not a governmental step in with an additional bill that would add additional avenues for radicalization in schools.

Public or private schools shouldn’t be a breeding ground for radicalization, religious or otherwise and students shouldn’t be forced to be pulled out of school when time with them is so limited.

In my position of being a scout leader I volunteer with kids across a range of schools in the Central Ohio area. The disparities of education are evident, whether they are from a lack of funding or otherwise. If schools are forced to implement RTRI where they may or may not already have the access to a policy it would further set them behind peers of a similar age group. School should be a safe haven for our students and youth.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings in [Zorach v. Clauson](#) and [McCollum v. Board of Education](#) highlight the dangers of religious entanglement in public education and underscore the importance of schools maintaining neutrality toward religion. The entanglement between public education and religious instruction is dangerous. It also undermines the secular purpose of public

schooling. The courts have repeatedly affirmed that public schools must remain neutral on religious matters, ensuring that students are free from coercion or implied endorsement of any religious beliefs.

Moreover, McCollum in particular emphasized that state-sponsored religious programs that occur within public school systems can create an appearance of endorsement, which is unconstitutional. Forcing schools to accommodate RTRI in a mandatory way risks crossing this line, creating legal vulnerabilities for districts statewide.

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,
Alyssa