

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

Valerie M. Poirier

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 Valerie Poirier, and I use she/her pronouns. I am a 36 year resident of Berea, which is part of the Berea City School district. In addition to being a homeowner for all of those 36 years, my husband and I own a business in Berea, which has been in operation for 39 years. 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.

The Berea City School district currently has a RTRI policy in place that is working for the families that chose to use it on certain occasions. I am not opposed to the policy being used this way, by individual families, for their own children, and on certain special occasions.

However, I am opposed to certain for-profit multi-level marketing companies perverting and abusing the policy for their own personal and financial gain. These groups are attempting to disrupt the school day for all students by removing certain groups of students on a weekly basis for what they are labeling as “religious instruction.” This must not be allowed.

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.