

November 10, 2024

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Arthur Fowler, Ranking member Robinson and distinguished members of the Primary&Secondary Education Committee

My name is Diana Doernberg and I am a property tax payer in the Revere Local School District. Three of my children have gone through the Revere system and I have always supported school tax levies both when my children were in school and now that they have graduated. I believe in strong public schools. I am speaking in opposition to HB445 because I believe it takes away control from the local district to represent the wishes of the majority of people in the district and to control the school curriculum. HB445 wastes valuable teacher time to further the goals of private organizations, which is a waste of valuable tax dollars, and lessens the ability of individual school districts to insure student safety.

Presently only one RTRI organization is active in Ohio and that is LifeWise Academy. Although LifeWise is a not-for-profit organization that does not mean that people working for it are not paid. The founder, Joel Penton, is a self-described “not-for-profit entrepreneur.” LifeWise’s tax return is available for anyone’s review. It is a very lucrative enterprise. I object to my tax dollars funding this organization’s bottom line.

Teachers’ time is valuable. Teachers are asked to do many things during a school day and in my opinion are not adequately paid for doing this immensely important work. They should not be asked to shepherd children to and from the Lifewise bus pickups, arrange schedule changes to accommodate LifeWise, or deal with disruptions to core classes to facilitate RTRI. If HR 445 passes I feel certain there will be more organizations attempting to arrange times during the school day for such programs. How much disruption should our public schools be asked to tolerate?

Much is made by LifeWise and proponents of RTRI programs regarding parental choice. I could not agree more. Where I disagree is that I do not believe public schools should be mandated to facilitate any type of religious choice. Religious education is a responsibility that should reside solely with parents. Ohio has no lack of religious options of all types and has thousands of churches. Joel Penton’s stated goal is to “reach non-Christian students with lessons tailored for 'unchurched’ children!” Public schools should not be expected to be everything to everybody. Parents should assume the responsibility of choosing their child’s religious education and for taking them to that place of worship. If the parents in a school district do not want to have a RTRI program their decision should be respected.

Lastly, we are all acutely aware of the need for school security and the tragedy of school shootings. Most of our public schools have spent significant tax dollars to insure the security of our children during the school day. Unfortunately, HB445 does not mandate the

type of security that would be available at the offsite private entity where children would be taken. Churches have been targets of violence in the past. Every school district in Ohio may not wish to jeopardize their children's safety with a mandatory RTRI program.

I urge this committee to vote against HB445.

Sincerely,

Diana Doernberg