

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in opposition to House Bill 445, which would require schools to have a policy in place for students to leave in the middle of the school day for religious education. My opposition to this is based in my strong belief that home schooling of any kind, be it religious or otherwise, is unregulated and therefore deeply prone to questionable content, questionable quality, and nefarious intent.

In a recent news segment aired by Last Week Tonight's John Oliver, several details on the issues with homeschooling seem relevant here:

1. One student reported that over half her school day consisted of her having to do chores related to cleaning her house and that her parents had deemed it to be "educational" for her to do that. This raises the question of whether or not the "religious" education students would be excused to attend would in fact be religious in nature, as opposed to a parent merely claiming it to be so.
2. One home-school advocate by the name of Katja Lawrence was recorded on audio saying, "We are so deeply invested into making sure that child becomes a wonderful nazi, and by homeschooling, we're going to get that done." ("Achtung! Amerikaner" Podcast, November 5th, 2021) This raises the issue of whether or not the religious education in question would be used to pressure students into political extremism, such as Christian Nationalism or worse.
3. The Homeschool Legal Defense Association, or HSLDA, has a founding president and chairman, Michael Farris, who has referred to schools as "a godless monstrosity" and openly opposed homosexuality and Roe vs. Wade, which raises the issue of what happens when LGBTQ students or those who have been the victims of sexual assault are told that they are somehow wrong for being born the way that they are or for being someone else's victim.
4. Many parents use homeschooling as a way to get away with child abuse, in that teachers do more than just teach – they also watch out for the signs that their students are being abused. Suppose that an abusive parent knows of a public school teacher who appears to be vigilant to such threats and chooses to remove their student from the exact part of the school day in which that teacher would be able to see the student. This would enable continued abuse.
5. Elon Musk, O.J. Simpson, and Darth Vader have all been parents – meaning that simply being a parent does not inherently make you virtuous. Nor does it make you a good judge of what a child needs to be learning.

6. The sister of the student mentioned in point one later noted that her parents had her and her sister literally do drills on what to do if someone from Child Protective Services showed up at their home: “Our parent would lock the front door, would call the Homeschool Legal Defense Association, hand the phone out the kitchen window, and us kids were supposed to hide in the basement. We actually did drills on this stuff, folks, we did drills in case someone ever decided to check in on our well-being.” This again raises the question of what kind of standard of education students might be subject to.

Furthermore, it is a well-known phenomenon that some people can suffer from “Religious Trauma Syndrome” as a result of being told as little kids that if they don’t do exactly what their caregivers tell them God wants them to do, that they’ll burn in hell for all eternity. The symptoms of religious trauma can include cognitive, emotional, functional, and social/cultural issues as well as developmental delays. (Winel, Marlene. “Understanding Religious Trauma Syndrome (part 3) : Trauma from Leaving Religion” *British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies*)

Cognitive symptoms can include confusion, difficulty with decision-making and critical-thinking, dissociation, and identity confusion. Emotional symptoms include anxiety, panic attacks, depression, suicidal ideation, anger, grief, guilt, loneliness, and lack of meaning. Functional symptoms include sleep and eating disorders, nightmares, sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, and psychosomatic health issues. Sociocultural symptoms can include the rupturing of social networks, employment issues, financial stress, and problems acculturating into society. Developmental delays can result from the control of information and discouragement of critical thinking in the religious environment, and Religious Trauma Syndrome has even been linked to such severe results as suicide and homicide. (Blumenthal, Max. “The Nightmare of Christianity”, *The Nation*, ISSN 0027-8378)

For all of these reasons and more, I am strongly opposed to this bill. Even if a parent is a good, kind, loving parent, with no intent to abuse their child, and even if they’re exposing their child to religion in a way that does not cause them any trauma, that still does not require that the child be allowed to leave school grounds in the middle of the school day to do it. There’s a reason most church services are on Sundays.

I ask that the committee reject this bill. Thank you for your time.