

**Opponent Testimony for H.B. 445**  
**Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**November 11, 2024**

**Kimberly Kuhn**  
**A concerned parent and community member**

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 Kimberly Kuhn, she/her. I am a parent and a previous school volunteer in the Southwest Licking and Reynoldsburg public school districts. I also previously worked for Johnstown Local Schools. 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 existing policy as I understand it was written and implemented based on a coordination of the student, their guardians and the religious entity with only minimal involvement at the district level. The district’s would simply accept that the student and their guardians felt that this religious education time outside of the building was needed, and they were simply receiving attendance information from the outside entity, and giving high school credit when applicable.

Presently, board members, district administrators and staff are spending an incredible amount of time facilitating the implementation of this policy for Lifewise Academy and ONLY Lifewise Academy. This has been done by districts’ staff communication with the parents via multiple email or other written communications. In some districts, the hosting of Lifewise Academy on school property for enrollment events, the communication of school staff with Lifewise Academy staff regarding students attending the program. This type of cooperation is blurring the lines between the public school district and this religious entity. There has been little effort by other religious entities to utilize this program in such a way, and this definitely does not give the appearance of a neutral stand toward religion. Policy at the local and state level is not being reviewed for the furthering of religious education for all religious factions, it is being influenced only by Lifewise Academy.

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 for your consideration.

Kimberly Kuhn