



Senator Michele Reynolds - 3rd District
Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill 49-Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 49, which will require Ohio K-12 public school districts to adopt a Religious Expression Day (R.E.D.) policy. This policy would allow students up to three excused absences per academic year to express their religion during observed religious holidays or religious activities.

Today, many students of various religious backgrounds in our K-12 public schools have to choose between attending school and practicing their faith. Those who are absent due to religious commitments are often marked as unexcused or otherwise academically penalized. However, Senate Bill 49 would encourage fairness. Under this Bill, students who participate in a religious expression day, would be excused for that specific day and provided accommodation for any missed assignments including tests.

House Bill 353 was enacted during the 134th General Assembly, which provided similar accommodations for students at higher education institutions. House Bill 353 permits a student to be absent for up to three days of each academic semester for religious or spiritual reasons. Specifically, House Bill 353 permits students to participate in organized activities conducted under the supervision of a religious entity, such as a church, temple, mosque or other religious or spiritual organization.

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and religious expression. The Free Exercise Clause established in the First Amendment prohibits the federal and state government from infringing upon an individual's religious practice. Requiring a R.E.D. policy in our K-12 public school districts will ensure this core principle of our democracy is upheld.

In summary, Senate Bill 49 would require the local Boards of Education to adopt a Religious Expression Day (R.E.D.) policy. This policy would allow up to three excused absences to every student in all Ohio K-12 public schools for religious expression. Students will not be penalized as a result of being absent due to religious reasons. In addition, the school district will be required to provide an opportunity for students to make up any missed examinations or academic work due to the absence. Ultimately, Senate Bill 49 will ensure every student gets the opportunity to practice their religion without penalty. Chairman Brenner and members of the Senate Education Committee, I urge favorable consideration of Senate Bill 49, and thank you for this opportunity to give sponsor testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.