

November 15, 2024

Vote No on Ohio [HB 445](#) & SB 293

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram,
and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Please vote no on HB 445 and SB 293. There are far too many legitimate concerns centered around allowing children to be released from public schools to anyone other than their parents or guardians, a long standing public school protocol. These concerns include no practical way of verifying background checks on bus drivers, religious instructors and their assistants, not to mention the lack of security measures which are unlikely to be in place at random venues. Think fire drill safety, Alice drill safety, medical needs and emergencies, etc.

As mentioned, there are many legitimate reasons to reject religious release programs. Others have compiled the following list of questions to which I'd also appreciate answers:

Will school districts and teachers be punished for students who fail to make up coursework they miss?

- Current law declares that "the student assumes responsibility for any missed schoolwork," but does not elaborate.

Will school report cards reflect the grades of religious release students who fail to make up work?

- Current law declares that "the student assumes responsibility for any missed schoolwork," but does not elaborate

- Will there be any minimum qualifications or credentialing for religious release programs?
- Can any person simply start a small religious release program and use it to remove kids from school during the day?
- Will this be different district to district?

Will there be any safety measures in place?

- How can we be sure the religious release time program leaders do not have criminal records / will keep our kids safe?
- Will this be different district to district?

Ohio law says the child's school isn't liable for injury arising during transportation to or from a release program when private transport is used, **but who IS liable? Are we doing anything to make sure students are protected?**

- Will religious release programs have epi-pens on site? A defibrillator?
- Who ensures religious release program leaders don't give out treats containing nuts and allergens?
- What is the policy if a student gets sick while attending a religious release program?

Public schools have to require any volunteer in their buildings to pay for BCI and FBI checks. **Will religious release program directors, staff, and volunteers be able to bypass the background check requirements?**

Will programs like LifeWise be permitted (in some districts) to send kids back to school with candy, toys, presents, and other incentives to make their classmates jealous and increase enrollment in religious release programs?

Will programs like LifeWise be permitted (in some districts) to take kids to amusement parks, zoos, arcades, etc. during the school day and then send them back to school to make their

classmates jealous and increase enrollment in religious release programs?

Will students (in some districts) be required to attend a religious release program if parents sign a release for them to go but they don't want to go?

Parents will have to sign a consent form — but how much information is it required to provide?

- Will parents even know what they're consenting to?

Will religious release programs (in some districts) have limitless authority to focus on politically motivated content that is potentially harmful to students?

- Anti-LGBTQ content
- Content explicitly supporting or opposing certain political candidates or political issues
- Etc.

Will individual school districts be permitted to require religious release programs to represent certain religions?

- Example: Christian religious release programs only

Will individual school districts be permitted to ban religious release programs from representing certain religions?

- Example: No Muslim religious release programs allowed in our district

What happens if a nontraditional religion wants to bring a religious release program into some districts?

- Church of Wicca
- Neo-Paganism
- Satanic Temple
- New Age
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
- American Witchcraft

Will religious release programs have leeway to start funneling funding away from public schools for counseling, after-school programs, tutoring, or other “services provided” that are not specifically the release program?

What happens if a large percentage of students in a classroom join an available religious release program? We’ve heard stories of the remaining students being forced to sit in study hall because there aren’t enough students to hold an art or music class.

- Isn’t that akin to punishing students for not attending a religious release program?

Current law states that students cannot leave school during a core curriculum class in order to attend a religious release program, **but does not appear to define core curriculum.**

- **Could students miss library time each week? Gym? Music? Art? Reading?**
- Could an amendment be added to this bill to ensure students **ONLY** miss lunch and/or recess — and require the religious release program to feed them?

We’ve heard lots of stories about students **leaving for their religious release program during a non-core curriculum period (such as lunch or recess), but not returning until the middle of a core curriculum class.**

- This means the entire class is disrupted and all students get distracted. It also means the religious release program students miss major pieces of core curriculum.
- **Could an amendment be added to this bill penalizing religious release programs that violate the law by failing to return students on time?**
 - If not, how will the state assist students who miss core curriculum because their religious release program violated state law?

Governor Dewine has been promoting research showing that 1.) if a student momentarily views their cell phone, it takes 20 minutes for that student's distraction to wane, and 2.) If a student picks up a cell phone and interacts with it, it takes 50 minutes for that student's distraction to wane. **Doesn't that mean that leaving for a religious release program will distract students for the entire day?**

Even if these programs are actually taking place exclusively during specialized/elective time, isn't that also a problem? **Should we be further limiting subjects like art, PE, music, or library/media that help children grow into healthy, well-rounded adults?**

Even if these programs are actually taking place exclusively during lunch and recess, isn't that also a problem? Recess and social time are central to whole child learning. Students attending religious release programs could end up missing out on this vital social time entirely — therefore missing opportunities to play and grow with their peers.

It seems likely that the recruitment strategies used by RTRI programs would lead to strained student relationships and tensions between students who attend the program and those who do not. **Isn't it counterproductive to be creating additional social / interpersonal barriers in our classrooms?**

Thank you for your time.

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