

May 29, 2024

Dear Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and the members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 445. My name is Dana Sinchok and I reside in Ashland County. I have had the privilege of being part of the initial launch of Lifewise Academy in Ashland City schools. As a Lifewise teacher, I have seen the benefits of allowing Release Time Religious Instruction (RTRI) for the children, families and schools in our community.

I have seen tremendous benefits for the children in the Lifewise program. Each week we see an eagerness and excitement as the children come to our classes. Students will ask, "Are we going to act out a story today?" Or "Will we get to play a game?". Our classroom volunteers have developed relationships with the students from our class time together. We take time to learn about the students' activities and interests asking about an upcoming soccer game or dance recital. More importantly, a child may share about an argument they had with their mom that morning and just need encouragement and someone to hear their struggles. We remind them of the character qualities of patience and gratitude that we had been learning about in previous lessons. Many children are coming from "hard places" and Lifewise provides a safe, loving environment for these students to learn truth and know they are loved.

A second benefit of Lifewise is providing support for the families of the students. Parents have told us how much their children enjoy coming to Lifewise and are amazed at all that they are learning. We have opportunities to serve some of these families. For example, after talking with the mother of a fourth grade student, we became aware of the family's need for food. Our director went and purchased groceries and diapers for the family. Meeting the needs of our students strengthens families and our community.

A third way Lifewise benefits our community is by creating a healthier culture in the classroom. As our students are learning about what it means to serve others, we have observed them as they learn to be kinder and more patient with one another. Hopefully, they are able to take these character qualities and apply them to their classmates and others. We strive to serve and come along side teachers and staff in the schools in our city.

Because of the many benefits of allowing Lifewise in communities, I am encouraging you to approve the proposed House Bill 445 which would allow access for all children in Ohio. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to advocate for House Bill 445.



Sincerely,

Dana M. Sinchok

