

Jeff Peterson

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 445. My name is Jeff Peterson, and I am from Delaware County.

Released time religious instruction is not just a passing trend, but a grassroots movement gaining momentum among public school parents in Ohio. A 2024 national poll by RMG Research revealed that 76% of voters support teaching public school students moral and character education, reflecting the growing demand for released time programs in hundreds of school districts. An example of this groundswell is LifeWise Academy, an Ohio-born initiative set to serve nearly 200 school districts this fall. However, some school districts, like Gahanna-Jefferson, have resisted these efforts, underscoring the need for more supportive policies to meet parental demand.

The benefits of released time religious courses are not just theoretical; they have a tangible, positive impact on students and schools. Decades of research have consistently shown that religious instruction can improve student behavior, academics, and mental health. A recent independent study by Thomas P. Miller & Associates on schools served by LifeWise Academy found significant improvements in attendance and behavior among students participating in released time programs. These findings underscore the potential for such programs to contribute positively to the educational environment and overall student well-being.

Empowering parents with the choice to include religious education in their children's schedules is fundamentally the right thing to do. Parents inherently understand what is best for their children and should have the freedom to decide on religious education as part of their child's schooling. This choice is particularly crucial for many parents who are unable to afford private religious schools or homeschooling. Providing access to released time religious instruction ensures that all families, regardless of their financial situation, can incorporate important moral and character education into their children's lives.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for House Bill 445.

Sincerely,
Jeff Peterson
Delaware County