

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 Scott McFarland and I am from Monroe County.

One of the primary founding principles of our country is the freedom of religion. I believe House Bill 445 is a large step in the direction of that founding principle, giving parents the choice to educate their child during school hours in the way they prefer. Studies have shown an increasing number of public-school parents who desire religious education of some sort taught to their children during school hours. This released time policy would eliminate roadblocks in the way of parents who would otherwise prefer to have this right exercised. Roadblocks such as unsupportive teachers, staff, or other school administration or policies should not be able to stand in the way of parents and their choice in religiously educating their children.

Additionally, we can all agree that moral education and character development are of utmost importance in children's lives and in our school curriculum. Many of the programs that would fill this released time religious instruction block would work towards that end. Contrary to what some may say, religious education is not simply about conversion or brainwashing, it is about life change. The principles taught in these classes will help students, religious or not, to improve the quality of their lives and the lives of their families.

I believe this legislation would be a benefit to our children and our communities for years to come. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for House Bill 445.

Sincerely,
Scott McFarland