

December 19, 2024

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor of Ohio
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Governor DeWine:

I am writing to urge you to veto HB 8, a bill that includes two extreme, unpopular, and harmful policies. We have strong concerns about the vague and draconian content ban, the requirement that teachers must out students to their parents, and the requirement that every school district must allow religious release time during the school day. This bill will jeopardize student health and safety, lower the quality of the education that Ohio students receive, and dissuade people and businesses from moving to – or remaining in – Ohio.

The original parts of HB 8, dubbed by bill sponsors as the “Parents’ Bill of Rights” goes much further than protecting parental rights. It adds vague and broad curriculum censorship and creates disclosure and alternative curriculum requirements that leave educators with conflicting rules and onerous new obligations, further straining school resources and staff time.

One of the most concerning parts of HB 8 is its requirement for educators to out LGBTQ+ students to their parents, regardless of the impact on that student’s safety at home. This policy, placing some of our students at risk of physical violence and threatening their mental health, eviscerates the trusted relationships between students and teachers.

We also oppose the addition to HB 8 during the lame duck session requiring school districts to allow religious release time during the school day. Religious release time during the school day creates a myriad of questions and problems that a school district must contend with, and this burden should not be forced on every school district across the state.

It is a myth promoted by the sponsors of this bill that religious release time only affects the students who participate in the program. In reality, these programs create disruptions in the school day that affect all students. When a large mass of students leave during the school day, it makes it harder for schools to offer a full array of electives for the students who remain. When religious release time programs bring students back to school late, classes are disrupted as students file in and settle down. When students who participate in religious release time tell their classmates about the pizza parties or other fun activities in their religious program, it creates a

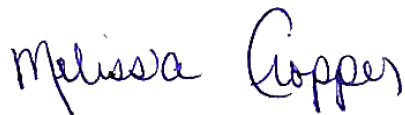
sense of exclusion for students who cannot participate because they belong to a different faith tradition.

These programs also have detrimental effects on the students who do participate. Physical education, electives like art and music, and even lunch are important parts of the school day that gives students time to broaden their horizons and socialize with their peers. Just because these are not core curriculum classes does not mean they are not important.

We believe in local control of schools and the ability for locally elected school boards to make important decisions about their schools. Whether or not to allow religious release time is one of those decisions that is best decided locally.

While we sometimes have policy disagreements with your administration, we have always seen and understood that you care deeply about Ohio kids and believe that Ohio schools should have robust curriculum and standards to set our students up for success. Please veto this impractical and dangerous bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melissa Cropper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melissa Cropper, President
Ohio Federation of Teachers