



NAVIGATING RELEASED TIME LAWS

Released Time Religious Instruction

LifeWise Academy is a released time religious instruction program that provides Bible education to public school students during school hours. In 1952, a New York released time program was challenged in *Zorach v. Clauson*. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the school's cooperation with the program as long as the program met three criteria: classes occurred off school property, students had parental permission and the program was funded by private donors.

This Supreme Court ruling has been ratified by some states' legislatures, but not all. Some state laws rule that they *shall* (or must) permit released time when requested, as long as the program meets the criteria listed above. Other states *may* permit released time but don't require institutions to allow it. Finally, some states have not ratified any law around released time.

To find out more about your state law, check out this [Released Time Map](#). Below is some guidance on how to approach school officials depending on the status of your state's released time law.

State "Shall" Allow Released Time

When meeting with superintendents in "shall" states, be careful in articulating released time law. Although we know schools cannot refuse released time in these states, it is important to be tactful.

Our goal in meeting with the superintendent is to:

- ◆ Tell the LifeWise story and the impact of released time on character development
- ◆ Describe what LifeWise could look like in their community and the potential for impact
- ◆ Ask to utilize state law for released time

Tips:

- ◆ Do not be quick to mention the state law or be too authoritative when communicating it. Often, the superintendent is already aware of the law.
- ◆ The best time to bring up the "Shall State law" is when the LifeWise Representative or Committee Spokesperson presents the next steps at the end of the meeting
- ◆ Most time should be spent making a compelling case for the positive impact LifeWise will have on the students and the community

Next Steps:

- ◆ Identify the point of contact to move forward with adding LifeWise into the school schedule

State "May" Allow Released Time

School administration in a "may" state may or may not allow students to be released during school hours for religious instruction. Within "may" states, there may be variations in the approval process and the individuals responsible for granting approval.

Our goal in meeting with school administrators is to:

- ◆ Tell the LifeWise story and the impact of released time on character development
- ◆ Define the 1952 Supreme Court ruling. Under released time laws, students can be released from public school during the day to attend religious classes, provided the program is:
 - ◇ Off school property
 - ◇ Privately funded
 - ◇ Parent-permitted
- ◆ Review local school released time policy
 - ◇ If there's no local policy, refer to the state policy
 - ◇ If the school board already has a released time policy in place, ask to make use of the policy
- ◆ Describe what LifeWise could look like in their community and the potential for impact

Tips:

- ◆ Do not be quick to mention the state law or be too authoritative when communicating it. Often, the superintendent is already aware of the law.
- ◆ The best time to bring up the “May State law” is when the LifeWise Representative or Committee Spokesperson presents the next steps at the end of the meeting
- ◆ Most time should be spent making a compelling case for the positive impact LifeWise will have on the students and the community

Next Steps:

- ◆ Identify the point of contact to move forward with adding LifeWise into the school schedule

No State Released Time Law

When meeting in a state with no released time law, school administration may defer to the 1952 Supreme Court ruling for legal cause to allow released time in their district. However, school administration should consider its own state laws for attendance when allowing students to be released without penalty.

Our goal in the meeting with school administrators is to:

- ◆ Tell the LifeWise story and the impact of released time on character development
- ◆ Describe what LifeWise could look like in their community
- ◆ Identify the point of contact to move forward with adding LifeWise into the school schedule
- ◆ Before attending the school administration meeting, the Steering Committee should investigate the school's student attendance policy. If a policy is not in place to protect students from truancy due to religious instruction, the Steering Committee should ask for an attendance policy to be established.
 - ◇ Example of Policy without State Law:
 - **Released Time for Religious Activities**
“Upon written parental request, students may be released from school to participate in off-premises religious instruction or to satisfy religious obligations. **Students who are released from class for religious activities will not be penalized for missing school.** However, such students will be responsible for all assignments and for the content of lessons missed. The District will not provide transportation to or from off-premises for religious observances and will not be responsible for the safety or welfare of students while away from school.”

Tips:

- ◆ Do not be quick to mention the lack of a state law. Often, the superintendent is already aware of this. Reassure the superintendent that an RTTI program is legal using the SCOTUS Ruling.
- ◆ The best time to bring up the “NO State law” is when the LifeWise Representative or Committee Spokesperson presents the next steps at the end of the meeting
- ◆ Most time should be spent making a compelling case for the positive impact LifeWise will have on the students and the community

Next Steps:

- ◆ Identify the point of contact to move forward with adding LifeWise into the school schedule