



Ohio Senate
Senate Building
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Al Cutrona
State Senator
33rd District

November 12, 2024

**Senate Education Committee
SB 293 Sponsor Testimony**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 293, on behalf of Senator Reynolds, with regards to Ohio's religious release-time policy. SB 293 is the companion bill to HB 445, which I introduced in the house.

In 1952, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Zorach v. Clausen* that religious release-time programs are legal so long as no person is compelled to attend, and they are conducted by a third party off public property. In 2014, Ohio's 130th General Assembly passed bipartisan legislation that built a framework in Ohio law for religious release-time programs.

Over the past few years, many parents in Ohio have expressed interest in wanting their children to participate in a religious release-time programs. This legislation requires, rather than permits, a school district to adopt a policy authorizing a student to be excused from school for religious release-time instruction.

Current law clearly states that a release-time program may only be conducted by a third party and may not take place on school property. The third party is responsible for transporting children to and from the release-time location. Further, children may only participate in such a program if their parents enroll them.

The intent of the bill is to leave the decision to participate in a religious release-time program up to parents, not the school board. This bill, however, DOES NOT mandate what should be in the school district policy, but simply that there needs to be a policy.



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By requiring school districts to adopt a policy, while at the same time giving them the discretion to determine what the policy is, we seek to accommodate both parents' wishes and the unique needs of the local school district. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on SB 293. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.