

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 293. My name is Melissa Schroeder and I am from Putnam County.

My two children, ages 5 and 7, attend LifeWise and have done so since Kindergarten. Additionally, I am a Teacher for LifeWise this year for grades Kindergarten, First, and Fifth. For my girls personally, it is the highlight to their week. They wake up every Monday and ask if today is Lifewise day! However, I not only see this with my kids, but the kids I teach. They are excited to be at LifeWise and I've had numerous parents approach me and tell me that their child loves LifeWise.

While I understand not every parent chooses to have their child in LifeWise, the majority of the grade levels I teach do choose to have their child attend. And because it's nondenominational, this program is freely offered to any parent or child who wants it. What I appreciate most as a parent is that it's MY choice. It is imperative that parents be included in the choices regarding their child's education, which also includes release time for religious instruction.

I've met all different families who utilize LifeWise. For some, LifeWise is an Avenue for them to continually practice a faith that is an integral part of their culture and identity. For others, it is a way for their child to learn good moral lessons in a way that feels safe when they may not feel that in other venues. Lifewise extends further than simply bible teachings, it teaches character qualities that will benefit these children their entire life. Please continue to allow us this CHOICE of wanting more than just academic instruction for our children.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.

Sincerely,
Melissa Schroeder