

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 Beth Stafford and I am from Richland County.

I have seen the blessing of released time religious instruction firsthand as a LifeWise helper, substitute teacher, and parent. One thing you will quickly learn by spending time with children today is that their lives are marked with hardship and darkness. They need hope, which is often missing in their home lives and school. In programs like LifeWise, students can learn about their deeper purpose and why each life matters—including their own. The love and dedication of the teachers are a blessing to each child who attends. Public schools also benefit from the emphasis on character-building principles, which can change the classroom culture. The benefits far outweigh the negatives.

The beauty of released time religious instruction is that it provides an option. Nothing is being forced upon any parent or student, but it provides an outlet for a type of learning that children don't receive in the classroom. At the end of the day, what harm can come from offering parents a choice?

Please do not rob this next generation of an opportunity to find purpose, hope, and love when they so desperately need it.

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

Sincerely,
Beth Stafford