

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 Sue Ralph and I am from Richland County.

I am asking you to allow parents to continue to have the opportunity to choose released time for religious instruction for their children. This decision should not be left up to school officials. I volunteer in a Lifewise program in my area. All lessons are character based education. This character building spills over into school and home life. The reports back from the school and home are all positive. As a result, they report improved behavior, academic performance and mental health.

A recent poll revealed that 76% of voters support moral and character education for public school students. All across the country, a majority of parents support released time programs to meet the needs for this moral and character education. There are 200 Ohio school districts now being served by Ohio's LifeWise Academy program. It is expanding rapidly. This shows the strong demand for released time for religious instruction. Please put this decision in the hands of the parent and not school officials.

Parents should have the authority to decide if religious education is part of their child's schooling. Many parents do not have access or the funds to send their child to private religious schools. SB 293 would make religious education accessible to all students, including those in public school, without burdening the school or taxpayer. Please pass SB 293 to allow parents to have this choice for their child.

Thank you for your time and attention to Senate Bill 293.

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Sue Ralph