

## Opponent Testimony for S.B. 293

### Ohio Senate Education Committee

November 15, 2024

Dear Chair Andrew Brenner, Vice Chair Sandra O'Brien, Ranking Member Catherine Ingram, and Esteemed Senate Education Committee Members Louis Blessing, III, Stephen Huffman, Michele Reynolds, and Vernon Sykes:

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Halle Ricard. I am a mother of 3 children in the Revere Local School District. I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 293, to express my opposition to SB 293, which seeks to alter the well-established system of Released Time Religious Instruction (RTRI) by changing the permissive "may" to "shall" in Section [3313.6022](#) of the Ohio Revised Code. I believe this unnecessary bill threatens the autonomy of local school boards. I urge you to oppose this legislation for several key reasons.

Religion simply put does not belong in public schools. There are plenty of opportunities for students to pursue religious instruction outside of our valuable school day. I chose public school because I did not want religion in my child's school day. I understand that it is the parent's choice, but we have to understand the reality of that. Children talk to each other. Children repeat what they hear. Some religious instruction organizations even provide trinkets and candy as recruitment tools for children to lure in other children. In addition, there are way too many religions to accommodate all to be offered within the school day. It's not feasible. I urge you to please leave public schools to being public schools.

The U.S. Supreme Court's rulings in [Zorach v. Clauson](#) and [McCullum v. Board of Education](#) highlight the dangers of religious entanglement in public education and underscore the importance of schools maintaining neutrality toward religion. The entanglement between public education and religious instruction is dangerous. It also undermines the secular purpose of public schooling. The courts have repeatedly affirmed that public schools must remain neutral on religious matters, ensuring that students are free from coercion or implied endorsement of any religious beliefs.

Moreover, McCollum in particular emphasized that state-sponsored religious programs that occur within public school systems can create an appearance of endorsement, which is unconstitutional. Forcing schools to accommodate RTRI in a mandatory way risks crossing this line, creating legal vulnerabilities for districts statewide.

In summary, SB 293 is an unnecessary and potentially harmful piece of legislation. It threatens local control, violates constitutional principles, and risks undermining the quality of education in Ohio's public schools. I urge you to protect the integrity of our education system and oppose SB 293.

Respectfully,  
Halle Ricard