

Linda Harvey Testimony Senate Bill 293

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 Linda Harvey and I am president of Mission America.

I am in favor of Senate Bill 293 because it would advance one of the most basic rights in America and in Ohio—religious freedom. This bill supports the right of parents to raise their children in their own faith, and to be allowed religious instruction opportunities during a routine school day that do not interfere with the beliefs and lives of others.

This bill would make it clear to schools that this positive opportunity should be available to students, with parental consent, and without allowing negative voices to override this positive choice. What are school systems like Westerville afraid of? This school listened to negative, fearful voices that apparently do not accept the First Amendment principles of religious freedom and freedom of speech.

The "heckler's veto" has been allowed to reign in some districts to silence the overwhelming community support that exists for programs like Lifewise. Our children are in mental health crisis throughout the nation, with more psychologists and social workers being hired in many school districts. Survey after survey shows that children who have religious faith are more secure, more stable and take academic achievement more seriously.

Why wouldn't schools want to encourage this program? What are they afraid of? Those who oppose Senate Bill 293 should simply admit that they do indeed support religious discrimination, and that is truly sad.

Instead, let's let go of foolish fears and religious bigotry, and get behind something that benefits students and communities.

I urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 293. Thank you.

Linda Harvey
Mission America