

“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 Jennifer Rice and I am from Marion County.” I am also a Board Member as well as a Volunteer for our local LifeWise Program here at Elgin Local Schools. I am writing to express my strong support for policies that would allow students to be released from school during school hours to participate in religious education. I believe that this is a matter of religious freedom and parental rights.

Many families hold strong religious beliefs and actively seek to instill those values in their children. Providing a mechanism for students to attend Bible education during school hours would accommodate these families' wishes and align with the principle of respecting diverse religious practices. This would not necessitate the school's endorsement of any specific religious viewpoint, but rather would recognize parents' right to choose supplemental religious education for their children.

Implementing a released-time program for Bible Education during school hours could be structured to minimize disruption to the regular school day. The program could be carefully managed to ensure student safety and avoid conflicts with the school's academic schedule. Furthermore participation would be entirely voluntary, with parents having the ultimate say in whether or not their children participate.

This approach upholds the principle of religious freedom while respecting the separation of church and state. It provides a practical solution that allows parents to actively participate in their children's religious upbringing without imposing on those who do not share their beliefs.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter, I urge you to explore legislative options that would allow for release time for religious instruction in a manner that protects the rights of the students and families while maintaining the integrity of our public school system.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rice