

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 Kathi Dunlap and I am from Allen County.

I have seen firsthand the positive impact of release-time religious education on public school students. As a teacher and community member, I witness the improvement in self-worth and positive mental health that religious instruction provides. A recent independent study by Thomas P. Miller & Associates found that LifeWise programs improve attendance and behavior in participating schools and I have seen this in our community.

I believe that release time religious education should rest in the parents' hands. Some Ohio districts have denied parents access to released time programs and have also rescinded existing policies, taking away religious instruction from nearly 300 students enrolled at Lifewise Westerville. These were students whose parents voluntarily chose Lifewise for their children – yet the school district superseded the parents' desires.

The Solution is SB 293. Senate Bill 293 addresses this issue by amending ORC 3313.6022. A simple yet crucial change—from “may” to “shall”—would require all school districts to adopt a policy for released time, giving parents, not schools, the ultimate choice to decide if their children can participate. Please consider the valuable role that Lifewise and religious instruction in general plays in the health and well-being of public school students.

Thank you -

Kathi Dunlap