

Chair Brenner,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill 293. My name is Derek Stemen and I am from Allen County.

While I currently work for LifeWise Academy, I am writing to you as a parent, coach and community leader. In my previous role as President of the United Way of Greater Lima, I witnessed first hand the struggles of many students throughout our region. Our school officials are heroes and do the best that they can to help mentor the students of our community. However, they need help. They need the community to come alongside them to support their efforts with things like better character development and mental health services. Released time religious instruction has long been proven to help in these key areas and a number of others.

More importantly, as a parent, I want to be able to choose what is best for my children and my family. Released time allows me as a parent to be a part of the public school while still honoring our commitment to the faith formation of our family. I would ask you to consider moving Ohio from a "may" state to a "shall" state for Released time to give all parents this same opportunity.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.

Sincerely,



Derek Stemen

VP of Advancement

419.203.9220

lifewise.org