

Opponent Testimony for S.B. No. 293
Education Committee
November 15, 2024

Maxine Irvin

Chair Andrew O. Brenner, Vice Chair Sandra O'Brien, Ranking Member Catherine D. Ingram and members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Maxine Irvin. I live in the Hilliard, Ohio. Both of my children graduated from Hilliard City Schools. My granddaughter attends and my grandson will be attending Westerville City Schools. I am writing 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 and undermines constitutional principles. I urge you to oppose this legislation for several key reasons:

Based on family religious values, my granddaughter would not be allowed to attend the religious instruction. This may result in: 1. Peer pressure by fellow students to attend. 2. Ostracized by fellow students for not attending. 3. It would create strife in the family because of Peer pressure at school. 4. Loss of instruction if grandchildren are denied classes because of the amount of students removed from the school. 5. Wasting of Tax Dollars specified for public education because the students are removed from the schools. 6. Westerville City Schools recently rescinded the religious release policy and it would force them to implement it and create all the issues listed above.

It immediately puts families like mine that do not comply with these religious organizations at a disadvantage. It marginalizes us both in the school and in public life. Students will tell their parents that we don't allow our children to attend those religious instructions. It will affect how neighbors and the community view us. It is essentially ostracizing us from the larger community, creating strife, discrimination, and attempting to coerce us from our core beliefs. We could become defensive wondering who is denigrating us in a country that is based on religious freedom.

When Section 3313.6022 was codified into law in 2014, the 130th General Assembly wisely chose the language "may" instead of "shall" to give local school boards discretion in permitting RTRI. The permissive language was designed to respect the diverse needs and views of individual communities. This flexible approach allows locally elected school boards to decide what is in the best interest of their students and administration while not mandating schools to accommodate a forced implementation of religious instruction. The current language of the law also reflects the judiciary's preference for protecting local governance from unnecessary state interference.

Please consider my testimony and oppose S.B No. 293. Please leave important decisions about when to adopt policy to the local school boards.