

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 Donna Gawell, and I am a senior citizen from Delaware County. I volunteer weekly with LifeWise Olentangy and have a deep commitment to the program's future. I attended the Westerville Board of Education meeting, where opponents complained about imaginary situations that do not exist and are fabrications of reality. Other complaints from the opponents of Lifewise, such as the children losing academic or special programs such as art, music, and gym, are untrue as we take the students only during lunch and recess at the elementary level. Also, they receive quite a bit of rigorous movement time with the fast-paced walk as they travel to and from the buildings and then the game time, where we play racing or sports games while still teaching the scriptures. They also interact socially with their peers and adults.

As I assess the opposition's complaints, I see that they are trying to exercise control over OTHER people's children, which is not their right.

As a Lifewise volunteer, I have seen that the teachers, bus drivers, and fellow volunteers are extremely diligent and careful to abide by all the rules and guidelines set by Lifewise, the district, and the school. As a retired elementary teacher, I am very aware of all the issues. I am impressed that Lifewise ensures even the small details, like being prompt with our pick-up and delivery of the children back at the school.

Parents, not the school board, should have the right to decide if their children wish to attend religious education during school hours. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.

Respectfully,

Donna Gawell

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