



Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 293. As you know, SB293 would modify just one word in the Ohio Revised Code changing "may" to "shall" with regards to school districts establishing policies for students to be excused from regular instruction to attend religious instruction programs, otherwise known as released time for religious instruction (RTRI). Currently school districts have the option to draft such policies, implement them, and rescind them as determined most appropriate for each district by their own school boards.

To be clear, LOVEboldly does not oppose RTRI programs in general. While we would prefer students receive any type of non-school instruction outside of school hours, we believe that religious and spiritual instruction is a benefit to all people who choose to participate. That said, we oppose SB293 for three reasons.

- 1. It requires school districts to create a policy without regard for the local control of education in each district.** Local control of education through elected school boards is a hallmark of primary and secondary education in the State of Ohio. Each school board is charged with setting policy, overseeing curriculum, and acting as an important conduit between the community and the schools in their district. They are at once charged with the stewardship of the human and financial capital of their district and the futures of the students in that district. With regards to something as contextual as faith, discretion and nuance are required if only for the fact that the religious landscape of Columbus, OH, is vastly different than that of Urbana, OH, for only one example. Each school district needs the independence, in this area at least, to consider what is best for their district.
- 2. As written, the bill does not allow a policy to be rescinded.** Recently, the Westerville City School District demonstrated that even though a solid policy was in place and at least one organization was providing religious instruction to students under that policy, the community no longer supported that policy. While the school board's action was hotly debated and far from universally supported, the board nevertheless heard from the community and decided to retract their RTRI policy. SB293 contains no language about rescinding a RTRI policy. Policies which cannot be rescinded present dangers particularly in educational settings where children are involved.
- 3. The current bill is being used as a vehicle to introduce one specific program into Ohio schools.** The media coverage on RTRI policies and programs offering religious instruction has highlighted that the primary program in Ohio is LifeWise Academy. LifeWise utilizes a secretive curriculum which, to date, they have not provided in full for public review. Sections of that curriculum which have been leaked included highly concerning teacher instructional materials including lessons targeting the LGBTQIA+ community and family configurations deemed to be non-traditional and sinful. SB293 is being used by

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LifeWise and few, if any, other providers to bring their version of Christianity into Ohio public schools.

For proposing to change so little—just one word—SB293 presents a policy quagmire. At this time, it is not for the state to be involved. The decision to introduce, implement, or rescind a RTRI program should be considered on the local level by school boards who represent and understand the local community.

Bearing in mind the reasons stated above, LOVEboldly urges the Committee to reject SB293 and not to allow it to continue to the full Senate.

Respectfully submitted,

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LOVEboldly



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