

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 Megan Bowman and I am from Franklin County.

Not only am I a product of Worthington Schools, but my husband and I are now parents living in the Worthington School district. One major deciding factor in purchasing our first home here in 2020 was because I wanted my children to go to Worthington schools. In 2023, I learned that Worthington had adopted a RTRI Policy. I was thrilled to hear about the potential of having my son one day participate should a program begin in Worthington. Once I heard about a local LifeWise team assembling to utilize this policy I had to jump on board. I worked with the local team to come up with logistical plans. I was impressed with the level of excellence the local team took in every aspect of the program, including ensuring that students were safely transported to and from school in a timely manner with minimal disruption to the school day, the quality of teaching the students received while being at the program, and the incorporation of movement and play during their recess time while off school property.

I attended Worthington's school board meeting on November 13th in which the community discussed the district's current RTRI policy. During the meeting, the board expressed their intent to rescind their RTRI policy should Senate Bill 293 not pass. This means that all of the students that currently attend LifeWise Academy Worthington under this policy will have that opportunity taken from them. It will also lead to significant disruption to the school day as students will no longer be in their weekly routine of attending LifeWise and educators will be left with the task to field numerous questions as to why that is from students. As a former teacher, I can't imagine being put into this position. As a parent, I am deeply concerned about the ability to pull a policy that allows parents the right to choose for their students to receive released-time religious instruction, especially since it is upheld by the 1952 Supreme Court ruling in *Zorach v. Clauson*. This ruling allows students to be dismissed during the school day for religious instruction provided the program is off school property, privately funded and parent permitted. Currently, schools can veto parents' requests for released time for religious instruction, as was the case in Westerville City Schools when the board voted in September 2024 to rescind the released time policy, taking away religious instruction from nearly 300 students enrolled in LifeWise. I fear that my child's district will follow suit with Westerville. SB 293 ensures parents like myself have the ultimate choice. I believe that parents should have authority to decide if religious education is part of their child's schooling, particularly as many lack access to private religious schools or homeschooling options.

I believe that passing SB 293 is advantageous to both the public school system and parents alike. A 2024 RMG Research poll revealed that 76% of voters support moral and character education for public school students. Released-Time Programs, such as LifeWise Academy, seek to come alongside public schools in these areas.

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

Sincerely,
Megan Bowman