

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 Gerald Cable and I am from Franklin County.

I am a long-time resident of Ohio (since 1973), a parent who raised three children in Central Ohio, and now a grandparent of ten grandchildren, seven who are growing up in Central Ohio. I am a taxpayer and independent regular voter who strongly supports the U.S. Constitution which codifies a U.S. Citizen's right and responsibility for freedom to practice religion. I strongly support parents having the opportunity to choose released time for religious instruction.

I am confident that you are aware that a Supreme Court ruling and Ohio law allows for released time for religious classes for public school students, but a critical flaw exists: school officials can override parents, denying students access to these programs. Many parents who want their children to participate in religious instruction during the school day face unnecessary roadblocks.

I support **SB 293** and encourage you to pass this important legislation. Specifically, Senate Bill 293 amends **ORC 3313.6022** through a simple yet crucial change—from “**may**” to “**shall**”—and would require all school districts to adopt a policy for released time, giving parents, not schools, the ultimate choice to decide if their children can participate.

Support for this legislation includes:

- A 2024 RMG Research poll revealed that 76% of voters support moral and character education for public school students. Nationwide, parents in hundreds of districts have advocated for released time programs to meet this need.
- Ohio's **LifeWise Academy** is a grassroots program expanding rapidly, now serving more than **200 Ohio school**

districts, illustrating strong demand for released time for religious instruction.

- 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.
- SB 293 makes religious education accessible to all students, including those in public schools, without burdening the school or taxpayer.

In spite of the positive support for the above mentioned release time, parents' rights are under threat. Some Ohio districts have denied parents access to released time programs. For instance,

- Gahanna-Jefferson had a released time policy but rescinded it when parents showed interest, highlighting the need for statewide consistency.
- The Westerville City School Board voted in September 2024 to rescind the released time policy, taking away religious instruction from nearly 300 students enrolled in LifeWise.

By passing SB 293 this legislative session, Ohio can empower parents, enrich students' lives, and strengthen school communities. It's time for Ohio to ensure that parental choice—not school officials—determines access to released time for religious instruction.

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

Sincerely,

**Gerald L Cable**