

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 Karen Spyker and I am from Union County.

I believe that we need SB 293 because 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. Decades of research indicate that religious instruction positively affects student behavior, academic performance, and mental health. A recent independent study by Thomas P. Miller & Associates found that LifeWise programs improve attendance and behavior in participating schools.

SB 293 makes religious education accessible to all students without burdening the school or taxpayer. 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 religious instruction. SB 293 would ensure that parents have the ultimate choice, not the school district or school board.

SB 293 respects both the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment by ensuring no state resources fund these programs, making participation voluntary. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of released time in *Zorach v. Clauson* (1952). Opposition to this program is unfounded as participation is totally voluntary and parent approved.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.  
Sincerely, Karen Spyker