

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 Rebecca Mills, and I am from Warren County. I was not aware that there were time release programs for religious instruction until the previous year. I had a friend who was excited about being involved in the Lifewise Academy program, but I was skeptical. At their urging, I investigated the program, and it seemed really positive and like a place where students could find hope. I'm sure you know the statistics that show the rise in anxiety, depression, and even suicide among our young students, and the alarming trend towards these feelings and expressions beginning at younger and younger ages. As a former Ohio certified teacher, I've seen these behaviors and feelings in my own students, and it is hard to have time in the classroom to address so many emotional needs.

At the beginning of this school year, I decided to become a teacher for Lifewise Academy. We are only a few months into the school year, and I have already heard such good things from parents. The general response has been that their children love having this outlet every week, they feel so loved and it's a place of joy for them, and it has helped one boy in particular who finds school to be a challenging place. I see the kids coming off the bus skipping, laughing, and so excited to learn. The character training has had a great impact on our kids as they are learning to be good citizens in their classrooms and develop healthy relationships with others.

In a time when so many programs are not optional for students and parents are having a harder time opting out of programs they feel are not healthy for their children, programs like Lifewise Academy offer healthy, wholesome options for families who want to participate in a program that teaches hope and love. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Mills