

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Linda Wagner. I am a tax payer and a strong supporter of public education. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

Religion and religious instruction is important to many families in Ohio. This does not mean that this instruction should happen during the public school day. Programs offering religious instruction that are only (by design) offered during the school day are disruptive to families who do not choose to enroll their children in such a program. Children question why some students are not present for the more social aspects of a school day (recess, lunch, sometimes specials like music and art). I have tried to understand the argument that these programs can only be successful if they happen during the school day, but that makes no sense at all to me. Having activities that only some children participate in can create artificial divisions among children, "us" and "them". There is so much dividing communities today, programs such as often further such divisions.

Each individual school district is currently permitted to evaluate for themselves whether the environment in their community can withstand this disruption, or whether it puts too great a stress on teachers, staff, and the full student population. Several school districts have initially allowed this program to trial in the community and found that they had to withdraw the position because the burden on the full school community was too great. The bill being proposed would take the autonomy away from individual school districts to make these decisions and mandate that programs be allowed. For some districts, this might compromise the ability of individual districts to provide a first rate public education to all of their enrolled students. Families who desire religious education as part of the school day are free to enroll in private religious schools.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this divisive bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Linda Wagner

9757 Hoover Woods Road

Galena, OH 43021