

**Opponent Testimony for SB 293
Senate Education Committee
November 16, 2024**

Candyce Glave, Mother and Tutor

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Candyce Glave and I live in Medina, Ohio. I am a mother of three children, two of which attend Medina High School. I have been a classroom volunteer, served on the PTO board for a number of years at my children's prior school and I work as an online tutor for grades K-12. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445. I understand the intent of this bill is to expand access to religious education, however, I'm concerned it could compromise important values like student safety, fairness in education, and an environment where all students can thrive.

As a parent, safety in my children's school environment is a top priority. Right now, public schools require strict background checks from the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) and the FBI for all staff and volunteers. These checks are in place to ensure that anyone working with our children is vetted. Even as an online tutor, I have been required to be fingerprinted and undergo BCI and FBI background checks. Unfortunately, SB 293 and its companion bill HB 445 doesn't apply this same standard to religious release programs, creating a double standard. For instance, LifeWise Academy, a prominent religious release program, recently hired a leader who had been dismissed from another job due to sexual misconduct with students. Although LifeWise later dismissed this person, the incident is a clear warning that consistent safety standards should be a priority. If we're serious about protecting our children, then it makes sense to have uniform safeguards in place.

Additionally, just recently, Governor DeWine signed a bill to limit cell phone use during school hours, recognizing that too many distractions hinder students' ability to focus on their studies. We know how important it is to keep our kids' attention on learning in a world full of distractions. During parent-teacher conferences in October, many of my children's teachers mentioned how significantly the classroom dynamic has improved since Medina City Schools implemented their cell phone restriction policy this school year. Students are more focused on their lessons, and they interact more with each other

when they break out into group work. Yet this bill would allow students to leave school for religious instruction and then return in the middle of a core curriculum class, disrupting the learning environment for everyone else. This would undermine Governor DeWine's already successful efforts to reduce distractions and keep students focused on their studies.

SB 293 could also have unintended social consequences. Programs like LifeWise use rewards like candy to encourage students to attend and bring friends, creating social pressure that can be particularly hard on younger children. There have already been reports of bullying in districts where LifeWise operates, as students who don't participate in these programs feel isolated or pressured to join. And if a large number of students choose religious release time, the ones who stay behind may lose out on valuable classes, like art or music, if not enough students are present to hold these lessons. In essence, it divides students into those who go and those who stay, impacting the educational experience of both groups.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to oppose SB 293. Our schools should be safe places where all students, regardless of their beliefs, can focus on learning without unnecessary pressures or disruptions. Thank you for continuing to maintain the security and integrity of our Ohio schools.