

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit opponent testimony today. My name is Douglas Wang. I am a retired business owner in the financial services industry and a long time Ohio resident. I was born here in 1956 and have live here my entire life except for seven years after graduating from Kenyon College. I raised four children here – three are currently residents of Ohio – and have five grandchildren in Ohio. My oldest grandchild attends first grade in public school in Shaker Heights. Ohio was been a wonderful place to raise my children and my children believed it to be a wonderful place to raise their children as well. I was elected to the Shaker Heights Board of Education last year to help keep the public schools strong. As such, I am strongly opposed to HB 293 (and HB 445).

Throughout my life, I have been a strong believer in the separation of church and state. I believe it is up to the parent(s) to find their religious path – or not – for their children outside of the public schools and the public school day.

As a school board member, I am very aware of the challenges public schools face in providing proper education for the students. The schedule is packed from the first bell to the end of the day so that any disruption to take children out of the school will mean less learning for the children. We believe that all the subjects that we offer, in addition to what are considered core courses – Art, Language, Music and PE – are critical to student development and success. Why can't families focus on religious education outside of regular school hours? There is ample time after school as well on the weekends for this instruction.

Additionally, having some students leave and some stay puts more pressure on teachers to make sure students are keeping up with their work and are properly assessed. Why these religious release programs may not face the same regulation, state oversight and background checks that public school staff and volunteers face is troubling in terms of student safety. Who has the liability for any student safety issues arising from these programs?

In the past it would have been unnecessary to comment on a program that steps so far over the line between Church and State but, nevertheless, here we are. This is not the America that most of us were raised to understand.

As a long time Ohio citizen, School Board Member, parent, and grandparent, I ask that you consider my testimony and vote NO on the harmful and – and, yes, unAmerican – bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Douglas Wang  
Shaker Heights Board of Education Member