

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 Kristine Bruck. I am a parent and an educator in the Cincinnati area. I currently have two school-age children, and I have been teaching in Ohio schools for 22 years. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its counterpart HB 445.

One reason for my opposition is the clear violation of the separation of church and state which is in place to support our country's right to freedom of religion under the constitution. While I understand students are not being required to attend religious education and that parents are providing consent, I don't understand why it needs to take place during school hours. As a teacher in grades 3-12, I've seen the success of many school programs and activities that take place before and after school. Why doesn't this format work for LifeWise? Families already have choices when it comes to their religious education. They can receive religious education before or after school and on the weekends, as is the case with many of my current students, and they have the option to send their child to a private religious school. I see no reason why religious education needs to occur during the school day in a public institution.

In addition to my concerns as a teacher, I also have concerns as a parent. A friend of mine recently moved into a district where they have already permitted Lifewise into their school. Immediately, I have an issue with the fact that this is not made known to families who are searching for the best school districts in which to send their children. The families don't know they need to inquire about religion in school because it's a public school. They shouldn't have to ask about this. Even more alarming, was the lack of security measures in place for the Lifewise representative. My friend had to pick up her daughter early from school for an appointment. The school's security protocols are very extensive in which she has to provide a timed, secure code when picking up her child. This being her first time experiencing this process, it took about ten minutes. In the meantime, while my friend was trying to retrieve her code, a Lifewise representative entered the building, was granted permission to enter without presenting any form of identification, nor did he need a secure code. He proceeded to lead one young girl out of the school building into a van in which they then left school grounds. This is alarming! What kind of background checks does this bill require? Can anyone claim to be a religious education instructor and start a group at school? Why wasn't this individual held to the same security protocol as anyone else entering the building? What provisions does this bill contain to ensure the safety of everyone in our schools?

For these reasons and more, I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this extremely dangerous bill that violates the freedom of religion guaranteed to all of us in the Constitution. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Kristine Bruck