

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

Thank you for accepting my testimony today. My name is Whitney Crane, I live in Granville, I have a 2nd grader and I often volunteer weekly in the school as part of my child's classroom, art room and in the lunch room. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

I firmly believe that decisions regarding religious release programs should be left to individual school districts, allowing local educators — those who best understand the unique needs and values of their communities — to determine what is in the best interest of their student body.

As a community volunteer who regularly assists in the lunchroom, I have had the opportunity to witness firsthand the impact of LifeWise on our students. I have overheard young children, using language directly influenced by LifeWise, discussing attempts to "save" their classmates, including targeting me when they learn that my family does not "have a church home". These are tactics they are being taught, and it is resulting in pressure and proselytizing behaviors that are inappropriate for a public school setting.

I have spoken with other families who share similar concerns, including reports of children being harassed on the playground for not wanting to talk about "Jesus Christ as their savior". My neighbor, who has a Jewish background, has two daughters, who recently transferred into Granville Schools. The high schooler has been pressured repeatedly to attend LifeWise, and has done so against her parents' explicit wishes. This has left their daughter feeling left out and created turmoil and intense conflict in their household. At school this creates an environment that is exclusionary and disrespectful of diverse beliefs.

Furthermore, I am troubled by the fact that students participating in these programs are missing out on "specials" like art and music. These subjects are vital for whole-child health and development, offering creative and emotional outlets that are essential components of a well-rounded education. Two years ago, my son's kindergarten class of 21 students was reduced by a full third during their specials as 7 children left to attend LifeWise.

I deeply value the role of faith communities and the positive support they provide to many families. However, programs like LifeWise do not belong within the school day. They are exclusionary by nature and risk dividing our student body along religious lines. Public schools should be a place where all children feel included and respected, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please vote no on this dangerous and divisive bill.

Sincerely,

Whitney Crane