

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 293. My name is Robert Spath and I am from Van Wert County.

I am the father of five children, ages 12 to 22 years old and I am a veteran of the U.S. Navy. I graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1997, served in the U.S. Navy for nearly 8 years, and moved to Van Wert, OH to raise my family.

I have been a public school teacher for nearly 20 years at Van Wert City Schools as a high school math and engineering teacher. In addition, for many years, my wife and I chose to homeschool our five children, but ultimately decided to enroll them in the public school system, in large part because of the opportunity for them to attend religious classes as part of their school day.

As an educator I see firsthand the positive impact religion and specifically Lifewise has on the well-being, education, and character of our own children and the children of our community. Our school district has many of the same problems other districts deal with: students are entering school from split families, from families struggling to make financial ends, kids with mental health needs, angry/unregulated kids, and a slew of additional problems exasperated and brought to the forefront because of social media, smartphones, COVID, the economy, and other factors. Our district is stronger, more effective, and more appealing because of the released time program offered to the children at Van Wert City Schools.

Parents should unquestionably be given the right to allow their children to attend religious classes as part of their school day. This freedom for which I proudly served and upon which I made educational decisions for my children.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.