

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 Shelly Lazarus. I am a parent of two adults who graduated from Shaker Heights Public Schools and an educator who retired from daily work but not from civic engagement. While I, too, graduated from high school in Ohio, I moved out of the state for years before returning to Ohio as I believed Ohio would be a good place to raise my children and be able to send them to strong public schools. I now have grandchildren in the schools in Cleveland and Columbus. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

First and foremost, I have always understood there to be a separation between church and state in this country. I am firmly opposed to mixing the two. I believe it is on me as a parent to find religious education opportunities for my child outside of the school day, and I expect to do just that.

I also am highly concerned about a number of unanswered questions relating to SB 293 and HB 445. While I won't include all of my concerns here, I will share some. I am concerned about school districts being required to allow religious release for certain religions and not others. I am deeply concerned about safety measures being in place. For example, how could we be sure that leaders of a potential religious release time program do not have criminal records? Would religious release program staff and volunteers be required to have the same BCI and FBI background checks that public school volunteers are required to pay for and pass? Given that these programs would occur during the school day, I am concerned about any minimum qualifications or credentialing for religious release programs. And, who is liable for any injury arising during transportation to or from such programs? Moreover, for all of the above, it's unclear what would be universal vs. different district to district.

Even as I share the above, I feel conflicted, as writing the concerns seems to give credence to a program that makes no sense in the America I know and love.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful, unAmerican bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Shelly Lazarus