

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Alyssa DeBord. I live and work in Granville, where my son and daughter attend public school. As a parent and involved community member, I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

I have serious concerns about House Bill 445 and SB 293 and their effects on our schools, my children's education, and our community, etc. I urge you to vote against these bills. I wish to share the concerns being raised in my community, where LifeWise has been active in recruiting and providing religious education to students.

Everyone has the right to practice their preferred faith, but allowing RTRI programs like LifeWise to take students out of school for religious education violates a fundamental Constitutional principle - the separation of church and State. Equally worrisome, LifeWise utilizes harmful content around LGBTQ+ identities, divorce, etc. Will religious release programs have limitless authority to focus on politically motivated content that is potentially harmful to students? Public schools should be places where every student feels a sense of belonging and safety. RTRI programs have also been known to involve students in recruitment or retention, which can strain relationships and create distractions in the classroom.

RTRI poses many additional risks that are unacceptable:

- Further limits instructional time for specialized/elective subjects like art, PE, music, or library/media.
- Lost unstructured time for social and play time at recess. Recess time is central to whole child learning. Most K-5 students receive 30-40 minutes daily. Providers of RTRI (release time for religious instruction) often utilize lunch/recess time for their programs.
- HB 445 and SB 293 do not outline any required safety measures. How can we be sure the religious release time program leaders do not have criminal records and will keep our kids safe? Public schools have to require any volunteer in their buildings to pay for BCI and FBI checks. Will religious release program directors, staff, and volunteers be able to bypass the background check requirements? Will this be different district to district? We know LifeWise's current background checks are inadequate as they recently hired (and later fired) an educator who was let go from her last teaching job for sexual misconduct with students.

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

Kind regards,

**Alyssa DeBord, MS, RD** (she/her/hers)

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