

Senate Bill 293
Opponent Testimony
Rev. Andrew Burns
Nov. 18, 2024

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

Thank you for accepting my written testimony. My name is Andrew Burns. I am an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church. I serve King Avenue United Methodist Church in Columbus as their Associate Pastor. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

As a pastor, I value religious instruction at all ages, from the youngest to the oldest. But I do *not* think the state or public schools should have any say in it or influence over it. Churches and faith communities of all kinds have handled religious instruction for a long time without help from the state or public school policies. We do not need that help now nor will we ever. Governments, policies, and elected leaders come and go. The church remains.

I realize that SB 293 does not *require* religious instruction nor mandate its content. However, the context and the practices of the organization behind and the primary beneficiary of this bill (LifeWise Academy) make this bill a backdoor way for the state government to influence students' faith and get around the first amendment's prohibition of the government favoring one religion. Additionally, the lack of detail and elaboration in this bill makes it possible that individual school districts would write their religious release programs to favor a certain religion (e.g. Christianity) and/or outright ban another religion (e.g. Islam) and/or favor a specific kind of Christianity (e.g. allowing a program that disapproves of homosexuality and not allowing a program that affirms LGBTQ+ people)

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