

11/18/2024

To: The Ohio Senate, Education Committee

From: Maureen D Welch

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Organization: Not applicable

Written Testimony in opposition of SB293 in opposition written testimony only

I am NOT a lobbyist

I am sending written testimony regarding Senate Bill 293, Regarding school policies for release for religious instruction.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in writing. My name is Maureen D Welch and I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445. As a citizen that pays taxes that fund our public schools, I have the following concerns.

Removing students from the classroom is disruptive to the participating students, the instruction process, other students, and the school community at large. Continuity in instruction in the schools is imperative, regularly missing classes is not acceptable. Governor DeWine has been sharing his concerns regarding the use of cell phones and how disruptive that can be to the school day. Leaving class and being transported off school property will be even more disruptive. Work and activities missed will create holes in the students education. How will a students ability to make up assignments and stay up to speed in class affect attendance at these off campus extracurricular activities during the school day?

Parents who want their students in religious education have the option of attending the church of their choice, which may also include religious study groups which are age appropriate. Parents may also choose after school activities that include the religious instruction of their choice. Multiple groups could institute programs which would fall under the category of religion. Will they all be accommodated? Would a student be able to attend more than one?

Safety and the knowledge of exactly what students are participating in during school hours and who is interacting with students is imperative. I see no requirement that those who transport, have contact with, and instruct the participating students have background checks, training in instruction and curriculum, are teaching age-appropriate concepts, or are trained to manage health and other emergencies that may arise or have emergency action plans in place. This raise red flags for me.

The idea that High School students would be able to earn credit for religious instruction of unknown content and format is ludicrous. A survey of age appropriate of world religion is appropriate for credit.

I ask that you do NOT require school systems to have a policy allowing students to be released during school hours for religious instruction. The safety concerns of are reason enough to vote no, however SB 203 would place an undue administrative burden on the schools, is disruptive, and

dilutes the education of all of our students. Instead require that religious instruction, if offered, be an after-school activity off of school property and arranged by the parents.

Vote against SB293 to protect all of Ohio's students.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen D. Welch