

Opponent Testimony for SB 293  
Ohio Senate Education Committee

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

Thank you for taking the time to consider my testimony. My name is Allison Paetz. I am a music educator in the Rocky River City Schools, a part-time lecturer in the Department of Music at Case Western Reserve University, and a resident of Cleveland Heights. I am here to oppose SB 293.

As a music educator, I see firsthand the invaluable role of music education in fostering creativity, emotional maturity, and academic success in children. I am deeply concerned that this bill, if passed, will lead to the unintended consequence of depriving students of equitable access to music education opportunities. Unlike religious education, which is often offered outside of the school day free of charge, music education is not readily available to students outside of school hours without significant financial and logistical barriers. As the bill is currently written, it offers no protections to classes outside of the commonly-understood "core" of Math, Social Studies, Language Arts, and Science. Music, art, physical education, and other courses typically labeled (inappropriately) as "specials" at the elementary level are crucial to a well-rounded education.

This issue is personal to me as an educator who has witnessed the transformative power of music in students' lives. Imagine a child in Ohio, eager to learn and grow through music, losing this opportunity because their music classroom time is selected for religious release programs. The lack of clarity in this bill exacerbates these concerns. For example, will districts and teachers face repercussions if students fail to make up missed coursework? Will school report cards reflect negatively on students who do not complete this work? And what oversight will ensure that these programs do not exploit incentives or promote divisive, politically motivated content? While parents may initially see RTRI programs as an opportunity to fit religious education into the school day, how many will take the time to seek music education (typically only available outside of school for a fee) for their children?

As a lifelong Episcopalian and church musician, I understand the importance of religious education. However, rather than seek to insert one more expectation into the school day for students and teachers, why not explore alternatives such as after-school or weekend programming? Programs providing RTRI programming could easily offer these same programs outside of the school day. The broader community impact is equally troubling. Public schools are

meant to be inclusive spaces where students of all backgrounds can thrive. SB 293 risks creating disparities and divisions by endorsing programs with potentially harmful practices while diverting time and resources from valuable subjects like music, art, and physical education. I respect the rights of parents to make the decisions to educate their children in the ways they see fit, however; we have only seen access to music education reduced over the past 50 years to make space for the next educational trend. We know that music and art education benefits *all* children, regardless of religion. Please help school districts prioritize these crucial elements of education.

I urge the committee to reject this bill entirely. However, if it must move forward, it is essential to amend it to ensure children may only access these programs before or after the school day. Furthermore, the bill must include explicit safeguards to prevent inequitable or harmful practices in religious release programs.

Sincerely,  
Allison Paetz, Ph. D.