

Opponent Testimony for SB293 “Regards school policies for release for religious instruction”  
Hearing 11/19/2024

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

I write to ask you to please oppose this bill. SB293 and its House counterpart HB 445 are unnecessary bills and a defacto unfunded mandate for them to do additional work when not necessary. Our local school districts already are able to write such a policy should they deem a reason from parent support.

This bill does nothing to address the fact that there is no regulation on the background of employees that may be providing instruction. It also fails to address any basic questions parents might have:

- Will there be any minimum qualifications or credentialing for religious release programs?
- Will school report cards reflect the grades of religious release students who fail to make up work?
- Will school districts and teachers be punished for students who fail to make up coursework they miss?
- Will there be any safety measures in place?
- Will my kid be in the care of a criminal?
- Ohio law says the child's school isn't liable for injury arising during transportation to or from a release program when private transport is used, but who IS liable? Are we doing anything to make sure students are protected?
- Parents will have to sign a consent form — but how much information is it required to provide?
- Will individual school districts be permitted to require religious release programs to represent certain religions?
- What happens if a nontraditional religion wants to bring a religious release program into some districts?
- What happens if a large percentage of students in a classroom join an available religious release program? We've heard stories of the remaining students being forced to sit in study hall because there aren't enough students to hold an art or music class.  
Isn't that akin to punishing students for not attending a religious release program?
- Current law states that students cannot leave school during a core curriculum class in order to attend a religious release program, but does not define core curriculum.
- Even if these programs are actually taking place exclusively during specialized/elective time, isn't that also a problem?
- Should we be further limiting subjects like art, PE, music, or library/media that help children grow into healthy, well-rounded adults?
- It seems likely that the recruitment strategies used by RTRI programs would lead to strained student relationships and tensions between students who attend the program and those who do not.

Sincerely,  
James Powel