

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Jill Colaw. I am a retired educator after spending 35 years in the public school system. I have 2 adult children that have gone through public schools. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its counterpart HB 445.

My reason for my opposition is the clear violation of the separation of church and state which is in place to support our country's right to freedom of religion under the constitution. I understand that students are not required to attend religious education and parents must give their consent. I do not understand why this needs to take place during the school day. While I was teaching there were many successful programs happening before and after the school day. Why does LifeWise need to remove students from their classroom? Families have many choices when it comes to their religious education. Many students receive religious education after school or on the weekend. There is also the option of sending your child to a private religious school. I can find no reason for religious education to occur during the school day in a public institution.

Another reason for my opposition is the safety of everyone in the schools. Public schools have had to put in many protocols to make sure the people entering the school buildings are vetted. Can anyone claim to be a religious education instructor and start a group at school? What type of provisions does this bill contain to ensure the safety of everyone at our schools?

The biggest issue I find is the lack of respect this bill has for local educators. As an educator I often had to deal with the chaos created from children coming and going in the classroom for legitimate reasons. The additional confusion caused by this bill at a time when you claim to support educators and education is incredibly disrespectful to the hard working professionals in our public schools.

For these reasons and more, I ask that you consider my testimony and vote a resounding NO on this dangerous bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.
Jill Colaw