

To: Chris Brenner
Vice Chair O'Brien,
Ranking Member Ingram
Members of the Senate Education

From: Kathi J. Machle
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I appreciate this opportunity to testify. My name is Kathi Machle. I am a resident of Worthington, Ohio where I reared six children and have volunteered, in various capacities, for Worthington Schools since 1993. In addition, I have visited numerous schools in central Ohio as an advocate for students with disabilities. As the daughter of a Presbyterian minister and a graduate of Hope College and the University of Michigan Law School, I recognize the value of religious education. I am, however, strongly opposed to the modification of the current provisions of ORC 3313.6022 contained in SB 293 and its counterpart in the House, HB 445.

Revising ORC 3313.6022 to make religious released time mandatory in all districts will impose a significant, unfunded, burden on school personnel and create safety and security issues within our schools. In some buildings it is, quite simply, impossible for young elementary students and students with developmental disabilities to safely navigate a schedule and walking through the building without direct supervision.

I am aware of several incidents during my childrens' school years where students remained on the playground after recess, usually because they were upset, and were not missed for a significant period of time. On one occasion, when I arrived to volunteer in my child's first grade class, I asked the teacher where he was. She had not noticed him missing due to the chaos of transition from the playground into the classroom. We found him crying in the restroom, where he had been for nearly half an hour. During my many years as a volunteer for Autism Society Central Ohio, countless parents have reported incidents of elopement during school transitions by their children with developmental disabilities. Increasing the number of such transitions only increases the risk of such incidents. It is, quite simply, impossible for all schools to ensure student safety without the supervision of school personnel during the transition from classroom, lunch or recess to transportation. This places an undue and unfunded burden on schools to ensure student safety.

Many schools utilize portable classrooms to accommodate all students. The need to travel from classroom to main building on the way to religious release time only compounds the need for direct supervision of the transition by school personnel. School districts should be allowed to assess whether students can safely navigate the transition to religious release time in order to keep their students safe from abduction, wandering and injury. Above all else, schools must ensure the safety of all students.

I am also concerned about the possibility that school districts may be sued for injuries during transportation or transition from religious education. While current law requires that the "sponsoring entity makes provisions for and assumes liability for the student", this does not mean that a school district will not be named in a personal injury suit and forced to litigate to dismissal or verdict, meaning large expenditures of public funds on attorney fees.

I have not even mentioned my concerns about the extra burden placed on teachers to reintegrate students into their classrooms after released time, to ensure that young students have the tutelage and

homework to catch up and to keep track of who is where when. I believe this issue is better addressed by teachers themselves.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that you maintain ORC 3313.6022 as currently written and vote NO on SB 293. The safety of Ohio's students depends on you.

Again, thank you for your consideration of my testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or comments.