

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 293. My name is Jennifer Jury and I am from Delaware County.

I am the Program Director for LifeWise Academy in Westerville. As a Release Time for Religious Instruction program, LifeWise Academy offers Bible-Based character classes to public school students.

In September 2022 LifeWise Academy began offering classes to 27 students from 2 Westerville elementary schools. These 27 students were enrolled in these optional LifeWise classes by their parents, the classes were held off school property at nearby host church buildings, and all funding for the classes was provided through private donations. In Westerville, the enrolled students attended LifeWise classes for 1 hour each week during their lunch/recess time.

By May of 2024, two years after its inception, LifeWise Westerville was serving nearly 300 students from 6 elementary schools, with dozens more families from other Westerville elementary schools on our waiting list. Fourteen local Westerville churches supported LifeWise Westerville with donated spaces, financial support and volunteers from their congregations.

Despite the continued growth in enrollment and widespread support from local church members, in September of 2024 the Westerville City School Board voted to rescind their RTRI policy, which had allowed for LifeWise classes to take place during the school day.

A small, but organized group of outspoken anti-religious and opposing religious activists used misinformation, misrepresentation, and speculation to persuade the Westerville School Board to rescind the RTRI policy. With disregard to the hundreds of students and their families that desired to participate in the program, the school board opted to deny the option for release time religious instruction to Westerville families.

Senate Bill 293 would require all school districts to adopt a policy for released time, giving *parents*, not school boards, the ultimate choice to decide if their children can participate in religious instruction. It is clear, based upon the experience of hundreds of Westerville parents, that such legislation is needed to protect that right to choose.

Please protect the right of all parents to choose what is best for their children's religious instruction by passing Senate Bill 293.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.

Sincerely,  
Jennifer Jury, Westerville, OH