

Ohio Senate Bill 293 -

Greetings Honorable Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair Senator O'Brien, and Ranking Member Senator Ingram and distinguished members of the Senate Education Committee.

My name is Brian Hanner, I'm resident of Dover, a community that the Tuscarawas River runs through, and parent of one of the 1,919,570 students in our Ohio Public Schools.

I'm what is referred to as a Cradle Methodist, having been the fifth of six generations of my family to attend the same United Methodist church.

For the past 20 years I've been involved in volunteering both in the classroom, and on various levy committees, financial advisory task forces, and learned about school funding that spanned from the DeRolf era to the Fair School Funding Formula.

I come as a resident of Tuscarawas County where nine school districts operate – two city school districts, two exempted village school districts, and the balance local school districts. Once neighboring school district, Garaway Local, has operated a RTRI program for more than 5 decades – referred to as “Cabin” time for the space used nearby the middle and high school complex. The program, operated by a local group of community church members, takes turns leading their own curriculum that is void of denominational doctrine. This has worked well for the Garaway for decades.

Meanwhile, another neighboring district, New Philadelphia City, recently had an audience during a district work session with members of the community who were interested in starting a local chapter of a nationwide, Franchise RTRI program, prompting outrage from parents, voters, local religious groups, including pastors from four mainline denominational Christian churches, and of the community. This led their board to a 3-2 vote to rescind their existing RTRI policy at a subsequent public meeting.

Two distinct neighboring school districts, both neighboring to the district where I live, work, and send my daughter to school, -with distinctly different outcomes.

Senators, I ask you to affirm the doctrine of local home rule – the very doctrine many of you referenced when making it the school board's job to navigate the mask rules and in-person vs. remote learning decisions during the COVID Pandemic. These were life or death decisions that certainly no board member took great pleasure in having to navigate.

Senators, we do well to recognize both the success of some locally organized RTRI programs, and the harm done where the Franchise model of RTRI disrupts harmony in communities where broader theological spectrums abide.

Deleting the “May” to “Shall” as outlined in SB 293– removes the opportunity for elected, nonpartisan, representatives of a school district to act in the best interests of their local community, and I ask you to oppose the measure changing “may” to “shall” as outlined in SB 293 and the companion bill in the Ohio House, HB 445.

I join the many requesting this committee NOT advance SB293, allow RTRI to thrive where it appropriately aligns with community standards, and not force undue conflict in communities where RTRI does not properly meet the norms of a local community.

Thank you, and I am pleased to answer any questions Senators may have, through the chair.