

Opponent Testimony for S.B. 293
Ohio Senate Education Committee

November 18, 2024

Dear Chair Andrew Brenner, Vice Chair Sandra O'Brien, Ranking Member Catherine Ingram, and Esteemed Senate Education Committee Members Louis Blessing, III, Stephen Huffman, Michele Reynolds, and Vernon Sykes:

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Elizabeth Nelson (she/her). I am a parent in the Pickerington, Ohio school district. I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 293, which seeks to alter the well-established system of Released Time Religious Instruction (RTRI) by changing the permissive "may" to "shall" in Section [3313.6022](#) of the Ohio Revised Code. I believe this unnecessary bill threatens the autonomy of local school boards and undermines constitutional principles. I urge you to oppose this legislation for several key reasons:

I trust our school board to make decisions regarding our schools. As a parent in the district I can reach out to our board members and talk with them about our issues in the buildings. By implementing this religious instruction release time you are disregarding our school board members and the decisions will no longer be about our district's children.

I am worried about our school district as a whole. If our own school board members that we elected are no longer in control over our schools then we are now left to decisions being made about our kid's education by people who do not know our kids or our teachers or our buildings and

that is a major problem in every avenue.

When Section 3313.6022 was codified into law in 2014, the 130th General Assembly wisely chose the language “may” instead of “shall” to give local school boards discretion in permitting RTRI. The permissive language was designed to respect the diverse needs and views of individual communities. This flexible approach allows locally elected school boards to decide what is in the best interest of their students and administration while not mandating schools to accommodate a forced implementation of religious instruction. The current language of the law also reflects the judiciary’s preference for protecting local governance from unnecessary state interference.

Please consider my testimony and oppose SB 293. Please leave important decisions about when to adopt policy to the local school boards.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Nelson