

Opponent Testimony for SB 293
Senate Education Committee
November 18, 2024
Christina Benton

Chair Andrew Brenner, Vice Chair Sandra O'Brien, Ranking Member Catherine Ingram, Member Stephen Huffman, Member Michele Reynolds, and Member Vernon Sykes

Thank you for carefully reading and considering my statement. My name is Christina Benton and I am a records supervisor at a dental college. I am a grandmother of school aged children in the southern Franklin and Pickaway county areas. I am writing to express my opposition to [SB 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 reasons:

It is no secret, based on the bill's sponsors, that this is merely an attempt to further infuse Christian nationalism into the realm of public education. This is a slippery slope that bodes poorly for our future. While there are dozens of reasons to oppose HB 445, I am going to focus on what is missed when students choose religious indoctrination during school hours, and the content of the messages they are being given.

While I understand students voluntarily attend LifeWise during specials classes, missing gym, art, music, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) or library classes. Students who miss these class miss out on:

- Learning how to code and engaging in computational thinking
- Building simple electrical circuits
- Programming robots to navigate a maze
- Building a prosthetic hand
- Building and testing a foam rocket
- Engaging in critical thinking
- Creating a helicopter out of paper
- Learning about solar eclipses and making masks and viewers
- Growing herbs hydroponically
- Using given materials to solve a problem
- Learning to work collaboratively
- Learning about 3D modeling
- Creating on-screen animation
- Learning to measure
- Building balloon-powered cars and racing them
- Testing a model structure on an earthquake table
- Balancing a structure on a toothpick

And on and on...

By allowing RTRI, the state is essentially saying that religious programs have more valuable information to teach our children than the professionally trained, highly qualified educators that we hired to work for our district. If we are charged with teaching our children and grandchildren to think critically and creatively, to develop their whole selves and to collaborate with others, missing a class like art or technology is a tragic regression. How, in fact, can we hope future generations find a cure for cancer, create meaningful art or mitigate the climate crisis, if we are not teaching rational, critical reasoning?

So, now, using LifeWise as an example, what do the students who leave for RTRI learn?

- The Bible, with at least 40 authors and written over 1500 years, is true and without error
- There is one true God, in three persons (we are right, everyone else is wrong)
- Only believers in this one true God will go to heaven
- Everyone else will go to hell
- We are all sinners from birth
- Divorce is sinful
- Being gay is sinful
- Angels and Satan are real beings
- When faced with a choice to obey God or our parents, always obey God first.

This bill's proponents preach a narrow and problematic biblical worldview and not one that every person believes. What if religion and science clash? What happens when the science teacher, who rightly teaches Ohio standards, presents plate motion in a lesson? When she shows the presence of matching fossils which are continents and oceans apart, and shows, through undisputed evidence, gathered over decades by real scientists, that continental drifts over hundreds of thousands of years made this possible? Then, a student returns from LifeWise believing a literal interpretation of the Bible, including the ridiculous assertion that the earth was created in six days. They now have a critical misunderstanding of how the earth was formed and has changed over something like four billion years. Sadly, they now believe that they are going to hell if they don't accept this doctrine, and also have an acute intolerance for other beliefs, orientations, and cultures.

It is clear that we are treading on dangerous ground. As Ohioans and Americans, everyone has a right to practice their preferred faith. But this practice must be confined to the hours outside the public school day. I ask that you stop this bill from receiving any additional hearings.

Thank you

Christina Benton