



**Ohio Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill 293 by Reynolds (HB 445 by Click, Cutrona)**

**Written Testimony of Gregory Chafuen
Senior Legal Counsel, Alliance Defending Freedom**

Alliance Defending Freedom is the nation's leading nonprofit legal organization that advocates for religious liberty, parental rights, free speech, life, and marriage and the family. We regularly analyze proposed laws and comment on their effect on constitutional freedoms.

SB 293 protects parental rights and religious freedom by allowing parents to access released time programs for their children. Many other states already have laws like SB 293 that require school districts to have a policy allowing parents to choose released time programs for their children.

Released time programs for religious education began more than 100 years ago in 1905 and have grown in popularity since then. Today, they serve hundreds of schools across the country and hundreds of thousands of students. Despite this success and popularity, some school districts are unaware of the benefits and constitutionality of released time programs. Laws like SB 293 help schools follow constitutional requirements while allowing parents to benefit from these educational opportunities.

The U.S. Supreme Court has long recognized the constitutionality of public schools' permitting students to attend privately sponsored religious instruction during the school day. It has even praised released time programs, saying that when "the state encourages religious instruction ... it follows the best of our traditions" and that doing so "respects the religious nature of our people and accommodates the public service to their spiritual needs." *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952). Consistent with the requirements of the U.S. Constitution, SB 293 protects parental rights and religious freedom by giving every family the opportunity to benefit from the free educational opportunities offered by released time programs.

Parents have the right and responsibility to guide the upbringing and education of their children. Many parents consider religious instruction an important part of their child's education and would love their children to learn about their family's religion and faith. While public schools can teach about the Bible from a neutral, secular perspective, they cannot provide religious education, and many parents cannot afford private religious education for their children.

Released time programs allow parents to have their children leave school grounds for a short time during school hours to attend religion classes taught by charitable third-party organizations. These programs give public school students the opportunity to receive religious education during the school day and they accommodate parents' desire for their children to receive religious instruction that public schools cannot provide.

SB 293 gives every family the opportunity to benefit from free religious education during the school day through these time-tested programs.