

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for reading and considering my stance. My name is the Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Lindon. I am the senior pastor of the United Church of Christ, Congregational in Medina, Ohio. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

As a Christian pastor, I've been keeping an eye on LifeWise Academy, a program that offers off-campus religious instruction during school hours. While I understand that some families may want to incorporate faith into their children's education, I'm deeply concerned about the kind of theology being pushed by LifeWise and similar programs—specifically, a Christian nationalist agenda rooted in a literalist reading of the Bible.

For those who may not be aware, Christian nationalism is a troubling ideology that seeks to merge American identity with a specific interpretation of Christianity. It advocates for policies and laws to be shaped explicitly by Christian doctrine, often at the expense of religious freedom and diversity. This deeply exclusionary worldview not only distorts the Christian faith but also undermines the pluralism and inclusivity that public schools are supposed to uphold.

Here are a few reasons why I'm concerned:

1. **Eroding Public Education:** By offering an alternative, religious-based instruction during school hours, LifeWise undermines the role of public education as a space where students of all backgrounds can come together. This division worries me because public schools should be a place for every student, regardless of faith or belief system. When children are pulled out for a literalist, Bible-based curriculum, it chips away at this shared space and can weaken the foundation of public education over time.
2. **Christian Nationalist Theology:** LifeWise's approach promotes a literalist interpretation of Scripture, which often fuels Christian nationalist ideals. This theology suggests that America is, or should be, a "Christian nation" governed by biblical principles, and that concerns me as both a pastor and a citizen. The Bible I teach calls for love, inclusion, and justice, but this movement seems to foster division, exclusion, and a rejection of the values that make our society diverse and vibrant.
3. **Coercion and Exclusion:** In some communities, parents may feel pressured to enroll their children in LifeWise to avoid social isolation or to keep them in step with peers. This can create an unfair dynamic for families who don't share these literalist beliefs or who practice other faiths. No family should feel that their child's religious education—or lack thereof—will affect their experience at a public school.

4. **Impact on Young Minds:** When a literalist theology is presented as educational during school hours, it can blur the line between personal faith and academic learning. This is especially concerning for children, who may not yet have the maturity to discern between a deeply contextualized faith and an exclusionary one. A narrow, literal interpretation of the Bible presented alongside academic learning could confuse children's understanding of both faith and the purpose of education.

As a pastor, I value faith, but I also believe in the importance of keeping our public schools spaces of inclusion and neutrality. Programs like LifeWise seem to cross a line, not only promoting a particular religious agenda but also eroding the foundation of public education in the process.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this unAmerican bill. Thank you again for reading and considering.

I am happy to answer any questions or provide more information if so requested.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Lindon