

Opponent Testimony for SB 293
Senate Education Committee
11.19.24

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony today. My name is Minna Zelch and I'm the parent of a current Ohio public school student and an Ohio public school graduate. I'm submitting this to urge you to vote against SB 293, which would require public schools to implement release time for religious instruction. I believe this legislation actually harms religious communities as well as Ohio's public school students.

I've been a church member for over 47 years. I've been an Elder and a Deacon. I've been a board member for two congregations. I've taught Sunday school for more years than I can count. I've been the chair of religious education. And I've served on the Board of Trustees for Philips Theological Seminary for over ten years. This legislation violates everything I've even been taught about religious instruction.

Public schools exist to serve the public good and they must educate every child who comes to their door. SB 293 is being pushed to serve the agenda of one extremist religious group whose sole mission is to "reach non-Christian students" and indoctrinate them to follow their extremely limited theology. This is the very definition of grooming. The organization uses heavy-handed recruitment tactics and extreme othering of students who don't attend, which has resulted in an increase in bullying and harassment of public school students who don't share the same religious views. This is something that should never be tolerated in our schools.

I will fight tirelessly for a parent's right to teach their children whatever religious tradition and theology they choose. However, public schools should not be required to facilitate this. If local school districts want to make this available, as the current law allows, then they have that option. Forcing every public school to have a religious release time policy is extreme government overreach, sends the message that school is not important, and values the beliefs of particular students above all others in a way that directly harms the students who do not subscribe to those beliefs. Please keep Ohio schools safe for all students and vote no on SB 293.