

Dear Esteemed Senate Education Committee members,

Thank you for accepting my written testimony. My name is Lindsay Umstead and I am a parent, and a former school employee. I am writing to ask for your support in maintaining a separation of church and state in Ohio's public schools, by opposing SB 293 which would allow time during the school day to be used for religious instruction.

Part of what makes our nation great has always been the freedom of and from religion. But there seems to be a crack forming in that wall that is supposed to keep the separation between church and state, being that there are some lawmakers, not educators, not parents, but lawmakers who want to make it so that schools are required to offer the option of religious based instruction during school hours done off site with private funding.

As a person who was raised Roman Catholic I attended church and CCD classes from kindergarten to 8th grade, every wednesday night. I personally have now spent years deconstructing the abuse and harm that religion has caused in my life, such as that everyone I knew was somehow bad, or a sinner. I met some of the most hateful people in my time doing this, and these people had training and a background check and were also concerned about helping us develop into "good people".

LifeWise touts itself for being a way to help build positive character traits in students, but who defines these "positive character traits"? Is it as simple as being a good person? Taking care of others? Loving everyone? Talking with others who have students who live in LifeWise district talk about the social divisions among students, leading to bullying, manipulation, and harassment of students who do not attend. This sounds to me like the opposite of what is being advertised. In my time working in schools we practiced moments of silence, which allowed students to pray, I also have never once heard of anyone who stopped a student from praying as long as it didn't interrupt instruction.

Religion is best left up to Parents/Guardians and children as a family to decide how to engage. Not to start a program that allows students to miss already precious academic time to attend during the school day. Not to mention instruction provided by those who LifeWise deems proper to educate students.

I implore you to think twice before mandating that schools offer programs such as this. Please keep the wall firmly in place between church and state. And know that if they really wanted to offer religious instruction that they would be able to do so by current standards of offering before or after school programs. Please see that by the design of these courses and the way that they are offered that the plan is to cause further divide and to introduce christian nationalism into our schools. Please reject SB 293.