

November 18, 2024

Greetings Ohio Senate Education Committee,

As a Westerville city resident and parent of an elementary school child in the Westerville City School District, I would like to express my **opposition to SB 293 regarding the RTRI policy**.

Although the stated intent of this Bill, per Senator Cutrona's testimony, is to 'leave the decision to participate in a religious release-time program up to parents, not the school board,' I believe the real-world impact of the Bill's passage would be much more nefarious: it will create an easier pathway for religiously-affiliated programs to gain access to public school students for recruitment and indoctrination. I believe the presence and promotion of *any* religious organization in a public school system is a violation of the Separation of Church and State. I deliberately chose to enroll my child in a public school system to prevent religious indoctrination. Therefore, I am strongly **opposed to SB 293**.

Parents are already afforded the opportunity to have a say in their children's access to religious education in the following ways: 1. Enrollment in a religiously-affiliated school, 2. Attendance at religiously-affiliated events *outside of school hours*, 3. Participation in local school board meetings, and 4. Voting in local school board elections. The Westerville City School District Board of Education followed the desires of its students' parents and made an informed decision to rescind its Release Time for Religious Instruction. It's time the State of Ohio did the same for *all* of their public-school districts.

My **opposition to SB 293** is also based on my professional expertise as a Clinical Psychologist. If public schools are required to accommodate religious release time, this will risk the development of an 'in-group/out-group' bias amongst students: those students who participate in the religious programming vs. those who do not participate. According to this Social Psychological phenomenon, humans are likely to give preferential treatment to others 'like us' and develop prejudices against those who are not. Potential ramifications include increased bullying, social isolation and worsening mental health among the students. I do not wish these consequences for my child nor any other child in the State of Ohio.

Please take my concerns into consideration and **vote down SB 293**. Religious programs in a public-school setting are a violation of my First Amendment rights, are socially divisive and cause an unnecessary distraction from the learning environment.

Very respectfully submitted,



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