

Opponent Testimony for SB 293
Senate Education Committee
November 18, 2024

Ann Shroyer

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

Thank you for carefully reading and considering my statement. My name is Ann Shroyer. I am a parent of a Westerville City School District elementary student. I am writing to express my opposition to SB293, which seeks to alter the well-established system of Released Time Religious Instruction (RTRI) by changing the permissive "may" to "shall" in Section [3313.6022](#) of the Ohio Revised Code.

I oppose this bill for many reasons, but a big reason for opposition is due to the disruption to the school day. At my son's school, parents are able to have lunch with their student - we just have to sign in with the admin, get our nametags and head in. The ease of this will be disrupted by 5 rounds of RTRI buses coming in to sign out kids (without a parent) - why will I be forced to wait to have lunch with my son because of this disruption? Why are my rights as a parent being usurped by a program? This also means that having a medical appt for my child during the 2.5 hour period filled by lunches at the school will be made more difficult because I might have to wait for buses of kids to be signed in/out. I will have no recourse to raise my complaints because of this overreach of state law into our communities. The state should not have such demands on our local school district. We elected our school board - all of whom are parents - and have recourse with them through school board meetings, emails and phone calls. I have never gotten a response from my state representative when I have called her office and also never heard back from my State Senator when I have called his office, so again my rights as a parent are quashed by this policy.

I also grew up near a cult headquarters in NW Ohio - The Way Intl. I saw their branded silos and vehicles if we drove near there on the way to my grandparents house, but because we did not have a mandated RTRI that they could participate in, I was not subjected to their propaganda in my school. I was able to attend church, Sunday school and youth choir in my home church with my parents guidance and supervision as a kid. I am fearful that a mandated RTRI will allow unfettered access to my child's classmates by programs with poor qualifications and value.

I also believe this unnecessary bill threatens the autonomy of local school boards and undermines constitutional principles. I urge you to oppose this legislation for several key reasons listed below.

The governing power over educational policies should remain with locally elected school boards. These boards are best positioned to understand and address the unique needs of their communities. School boards in Ohio derive their authority primarily from Ohio Revised Code Chapter 3313, which grants them the power to adopt policies for the governance of their schools. School boards have been granted significant governance powers over matters directly related to the management of their school districts. These powers allow the elected officials on local school boards to tailor their policies to the unique needs of their students and communities. Ohio courts have consistently upheld the importance of local control in public education decisions, reinforcing that state mandates should not undermine this principle, particularly in areas of policy and operations. These decisions have reinforced the governing power of local school boards.

The Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio School Boards Association, emphasize the critical role that local governance plays in ensuring that public education serves the best interests of students, free from unnecessary state mandates.

- “Each child deserves to be educated in a way that meets their unique needs. Local school boards, working in collaboration with educators and families, play a pivotal role in creating tailored educational experiences that reflect the values and priorities of their communities.”¹
- “Local control is essential to the success of Ohio’s public schools. School boards are directly accountable to the communities they serve, giving them the flexibility and responsibility to create policies and allocate resources that address specific needs within the district. Local governance ensures that decisions about education are made by those who know the students and families best.”²
- “Local school boards are best suited to make decisions about the education of students in their districts. These boards understand the unique circumstances and challenges faced by their communities and are able to implement policies that reflect local priorities while meeting state requirements. Centralized decision-making undermines the ability of school boards to serve their students effectively.”³

Additionally, in 1988 Ohio Attorney General Anthony J. Celebrezze Jr. put out guidance for RTRI in which he covered the issue of policy governance in depth and stressed the importance of local decision making in [OH AG OPINION NO. 88-001](#) saying:

R.C. 3313.20 and R.C. 3313.47 confer authority upon a board of education, in the reasonable exercise of its discretion, to adopt whatever policies it deems necessary for the government of the pupils of its schools. Thus, whether a board of education should adopt

¹ ["Each Child, Our Future" \(2018 Strategic Plan\)](#)

² ["Guide to Boardmanship" OSBA](#)

³ ["Legislative Platform" OSBA](#)

a religious instruction released-time policy is a matter that must be resolved by the board itself, taking into account the particular circumstances of the school district in question and the need within the school district for such a policy.”

Please consider my testimony and oppose SB 293. Please leave important decisions about when to adopt policy to the local school boards - of which I know my school board is made up of mostly parents in the district.