

OPPOSITION TESTIMONY FOR SENATE BILL 293

To the honorable Senators of the Education Committee,

My name is Zachary Parrish. I am submitting the personal experiences of my daughter and I as testimony in opposition to SB 293.

I was born, raised and have been a lifelong resident of Ohio until 2023 when I moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana. Although I am no longer residing in Ohio, the discrimination and neglect my daughter faced directly because of release time religious instruction provided by LifeWise Academy took place in 2021 & 2022 when we were still residents of your great state. I've been encouraged to share my story even though some of you should be familiar with it already. Since you're involved with this bill I would hope you've been paying attention to the [media](#) coverage of the issues surrounding it.

When our family went to our daughter's 2nd grade open house in the fall of 2021 her teachers gave me a full sales pitch and multiple pieces of [literature](#) encouraging me to sign my child up for LifeWise. Along with this material I was also given a [classroom schedule](#) of the weekly "specials" rotations. This classroom schedule listed the weekly class as LifeWise, by name. It wasn't listed as an elective or an option, it was simply listed as THE "specials" class one day a week right beside Art, Gym, Library/Tech and Music.

There was no mention of what the children who didn't want to attend would be doing for this period, so I started sending emails. I was told my daughter would be sent to an uninstructed study hall to read by herself, do make-up work and other [busy work](#) activities. This "[study hall](#)" as the school called it, also took place in the gymnasium instead of a classroom.

I would like to directly ask the committee members why my daughter can just be tossed aside and neglected to accommodate others' religious education? Why is my daughter deprived of an instructed lesson plan unless she leaves the building to be taught about the Bible? Why are these programs being allowed to waste what few educational hours we have in our public school days, for not just the students attending RTRI programs, but clearly of all the students.

When my concerns were [brought to the school district by the Freedom From Religion Foundation](#), the school's lawyer immediately [responded](#) by saying my claims were all entirely false despite the massive amount of documented evidence proving my allegations to be true. The school's pattern of behavior continued the following year, when yet again in 3rd grade my daughter was sent home a [scheduled](#) listing LifeWise by name.

Further [public records requests](#) provided even more evidence of the discrimination and pressure being put on students who didn't participate in LifeWise. In the schools' internal emails a school administrator was found to be saying a student "[needs some Jesus in his life](#)" while corresponding with a LifeWise employee. They also show teachers referring directly to my

daughter and others as “[LifeWise leftovers](#)” and [admitting](#) there's no instruction or educational plan for the children being sent to study hall.

In addition to this neglect of the school, my daughter also went through relentless peer pressure and bullying for not attending LifeWise classes. When second graders are being shoved into a gymnasium for an un-instructed study hall and being told they're going to hell by their classmates it completely invalidates the claims of RTRI supporters who say the children who don't go aren't affected. I ask, why would the committee consider mandating every public school to adopt a program like this when the issues that can be caused are so evident. My experience is not a one off, it is one of many. Defiance City Schools is not the only district who stomped all over the liberty of students by improperly implementing and endorsing LifeWise. This is just my experience, I urge you to look at the other examples such as Elmwood and Norwalk which have been submitted in others' testimony.

Pretending this mandate has anything to do with parental choice is nothing short of disingenuous. Considering you are the “education” committee, I strongly encourage you to actually protect public education, unless the whole point of this legislation is to further the agenda of dismantling it. It's very clear by the legislative action in [Oklahoma](#), [Indiana](#) and states all across the nation, that this copy and paste bill was designed by and for LifeWise to target states which they call “[low hanging fruit](#)”. Is that what Ohio is? Low hanging fruit ripe for the picking for Christian Nationalism?

Do not allow state legislation to be dictated by private entities, that's not who you were elected to represent.

- Zachary Parrish