

Opposition Testimony for SB 293

Ohio Senate Education Committee

November 18, 2024

Testimony from: Karen R. Thorn

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

Thank you for allowing my testimony regarding SB 293. My name is Karen Thorn. I am a resident of Medina, OH, and reside within the Medina City School District. Although I no longer have children attending school in the district, I and my two daughters are graduates of Medina City Schools.

I have been very active as a parent and volunteer with our schools over the years. I also served on the Medina City Schools Foundation for 6 years, including one year as President. I have seen what quality education looks like and know how difficult it can be to attain that during the school day.

I am writing in opposition to SB 293. Changing the language of current legislation to make it compulsory to create RTRI policy will set the stage for divisive interference with public education.

Currently, students in Ohio public schools spend only 10% of their time in scholastic instruction. That leaves 90% for other pursuits, including religious instruction. Why are zealous religious organizations targeting that 10% time slot when there are so many other opportunities to give foundational religious instruction?

In most faiths, religious instruction takes place outside of the school day where secular concerns are not a distraction. Families already have many opportunities to offer religious instruction to their children, including sending them to parochial schools. Forcing districts to create RTRI sets a precedent and will give *all* religious institutions access to the school day creating a truly chaotic learning environment.

Distractions during the school day are also a concern, as Governor DeWine emphasized when he supported the legislation regarding cell phone usage in schools. Taking students in and out of schools for RTRI will be distracting for them and other students, as well as the teachers and staff. Those disruptions will negatively impact the learning environment and scholastic achievement.

Most school districts in Ohio have mission and vision statements focused on creating a learning environment that is inclusive and supportive. Evangelical religion is neither of those and the doctrine they promote vilifies others who don't practice their beliefs. This can lead to targeting and bullying of other students, two issues that are already at unprecedented levels within our schools.

I believe that public education is the foundation upon which our communities are built. These communities are diverse and we should be honored to serve each student who resides in them. Providing students a quality education should be our foremost priority and religious instruction has no place within the school day.

Please vote NO on SB 293.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Regards,

Karen R. Thorn