

November 18, 2024

To Whom it May Concern,

I would like to express and submit my opposition to SB 293, which would block the ability of elected school boards from refusing to entertain potentially harmful programs during school hours. I believe school boards should maintain the power to make decisions that will be in the best interest of the communities they serve. If schools are required to allow RTRI programs to operate, they do not have the option to protect their students from the influence of unregulated, unsafe, even predatory programs that seek to recruit, proselytize, and indoctrinate our youngest, most vulnerable community members.

Students should not be missing lunch and recess, or important classes like art, music, social skills, and even STEM content in some areas, to be taught a set of beliefs that is counter to the school's science, history, and social curriculum. Having these programs take the place of time on school grounds makes what they teach feel to kids like *part* of school, confusing fact with faith. Religious education should never be *part* of public school.

Public school is education for everyone. It provides a core foundation of learning to a diverse population of children from different faiths, different races, different backgrounds, and otherwise different identities. A very important part of public education is learning social skills. It is learning how to interact, make friends, and treat all people – regardless of what they look like, what faith they carry, who they love, where they are from, etc. – with kindness and respect. Students in public school learn that everyone is different, and that differences should be recognized and embraced.

If a program run during school hours teaches that only one faith is good, that divorce is a sin, that having two moms is evil, that not fitting in a specific box will lead you to death and suffering, how does that teach children to look at their peers when they return to their desks? In my child's grade school, I know there are trans and nonbinary kids. I know there are kids with single parents and kids with divorced parents. I know at least three different same-sex parent couples with children in my child's grade alone, and I know there are more that I haven't met. These are all kids who are vulnerable and endangered by their peers (and sometimes themselves) being taught during school hours that there is only one "right" and "good" way to exist.

While I believe it is a parent's right to share their faith with their child, that instruction does not belong during school hours in public school. It belongs in private school. It belongs before school. It belongs after school. It belongs on the weekend. It belongs during family time, not during public education time. There are religious programs at religious facilities all over the state. According to a quick internet search, there are twenty-six churches just in my own small suburb. There is no reason to force the allocation of precious time during an already full curriculum to RTRI programs. I personally don't feel that RTRI programs are appropriate at all, and I know that there are also parents who feel strongly in favor of them. Whether or not one of these programs is the right fit for a certain community, it should be up to the school board members that community elected to make that determination.

Thank you for your time and the consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely, a parent concerned for the well-being of ALL children