

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Mandy Wagner. I am a parent from Stark County residing in the Plain Local School District. Not only am I a parent to five school-aged children, I also co-Chair the Plain Local Schools Parent Advisory Committee. I am sending this testimony because I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

My number one concern (among so many) is the lack of safety measures put in place to protect our children. First of all, there seems to be no provisions in this bill—or anywhere for that matter—for religious program leaders to have required background checks. This is especially frustrating to us parents who have to pay money out of our own pockets, and often have to miss time from work to undergo background checks, if we want to volunteer in our own children's classrooms or chaperone field trips. It is mind blowing to me to think that any unchecked person can host a religious gathering—off campus!--with our children with no background check required of him/her whatsoever.

Secondly, since Ohio law says that the school isn't liable for injury arising during transportation to or from a release program when private transportation is used, who IS liable? What are we doing to make sure our children are protected? We've had multiple destructive and fatal accidents recently across Ohio involving students. This opens the door for more with zero accountability. If an accident happens involving these children, what will you tell parents? Oops? Sorry? This makes no sense to me.

Lastly, there appears to be no medical standards or practices that have been established for students while in transit to or from the off-campus site or while at their religious meeting. Will religious release programs have epi-pens on site? A defibrillator? What is the policy if a student gets sick while attending a religious release program? Is there a nurse on site? Anyone trained in CPR? Will leaders be required to undergo the myriad trainings school staff completes each year through Safe Schools to mitigate bullying, violence, etc? Will they be mandated reporters of abuse or self-harm?

There are so many questions left unanswered, and these are just the tip of the iceberg. To vote in favor of this bill while ignoring the questions, without having a clear plan of what this would look like, and without considering potential issues or problems that may arise, is irresponsible at best, dangerous in reality.

When working with children, all of these matters must be addressed and planned for to ensure the safety of our most precious gifts. This bill does none of that. As a parent leader in Plain Local, our district does an amazing job each and every day taking into account all matters involving our children, their students, to ensure their safety and that they receive a quality education. And here's the thing: this is what parents have come to expect without question. We expect that same level of standards, training, professionalism, commitment, and planning from anyone with access to our children.

Serving on the Parent Advisory Committee, I have learned so much about the parents in my community. They're my neighbors. They are hard working and want the best for their children.

They are also tired.

There is so much coming at them between their jobs, their children, their personal lives (spiritual, physical, or mental) and family and friends. Our role as an advisory committee is to advocate for parents and better help them understand the issues in education that they don't for myriad reasons (time, lack of resources, etc.). Parents expect a high level of standards when it comes to school and their children. Again, it is the precedent that has been set by our amazing public school system and our well-trained educators. If lawmakers, this committee, opens the door to religious opportunities during the school day, parents will trust (naively) that all matters of precaution and care have been taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children. But this bill fails to do so. It is your responsibility to Ohio's parents and children to ensure to the best of your ability that you have done your due diligence. Until at which time you have, I urge you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely
Mandy Wagner
Parent, Plain Local School District