

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 445. My name is Scott Thompson, and I am from Fairfield County. I am the President of Thompson Concrete and a proud member of Carroll, Ohio. Since the start of the 2023-2024 school year, our school district, Bloom-Carroll Local Schools, and community has welcomed LifeWise Academy as part of our team. LifeWise helps children understand their impact as servant leaders as well as build integrity and knowledge through Bible-based learning. Personally, I have been able to witness the positive impact this partnership has had through the eyes of my grandchildren. LifeWise has given them (along with the other two hundred seventy-seven 3rd-8th grade participants) a chance to value their faith in ways that would not have been provided without released religious instruction and without the opportunity to choose what is best for them.

Our community is beyond blessed that the partnership between Bloom-Carroll Local Schools and LifeWise has been met with ease and humility. In fact, the program continues to grow; opportunity for grades 6th-8th was offered starting in February 2024 and grades 1st-2nd will be embraced during the 2024-2025 school year. However, ALL communities should have the same positive outcome when honoring the separation of church and state. I pray that House Bill 445 brings about change; change where religious education is not only accessible within public schools but also honored.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.

Sincerely,

Scott Thompson