

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 Laura Smith-Morelock.

I am a concerned citizen and mental health therapist.

I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

I am worried that allowing students to attend religious release programs during the school day may blur the lines between church and state. Public schools are meant to be inclusive spaces where students of all backgrounds feel equally represented and respected. When religious programs are integrated into the school schedule, it could give the impression that the school is endorsing or prioritizing particular religious beliefs, even if unintentionally. This might alienate students and families who hold different beliefs or none at all.

Additionally, it raises questions about fairness and the use of public school resources, such as time and administrative oversight, to accommodate religious instruction. Upholding a clear separation between church and state ensures that public schools remain neutral spaces dedicated to education, free from any perception of religious favoritism."

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Laura Smith-Morelock