

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

Thank you for allowing my testimony. My name is Laura Deno. I am a lifelong Ohio resident, and mother of two children currently enrolled in the public school system. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

While I am not an attorney, I do question how the proposed change would align with the Ohio Constitution, Article I, Section 7 as it reads:

"No person shall be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or maintain any form of worship, against his consent; and no preferences shall be given, by law, to any religious society nor shall any interference with the rights of conscience be permitted."

As the proposed bill would only allow for an excused absences for students who practice a religion, this appears to violate the Ohio Constitution, specifically the language of, "no preference shall be given by law, to any religious society." To give the preference of leaving school for religious education only and no other types of education would violate the Ohio Constitution as stated and cited previously. Preference would be given to those students who practice religion over those who do not. The proposed law would force, not just allow, the local school boards to adopt a policy even if the school board and citizens of the school district oppose it in general. This time could be used as a recruiting tool to attend a private school resulting in funds being diverted from public schools to private schools through the voucher program. There would be no option for the local school district to challenge the policy at the local level and would impose a discriminatory hardship upon nonreligious people as it would require this to be changed at the state level through the general assembly.