

Ohio Senate Bill 293-Opponent Testimony
November 19,2024

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, Member Blessing, Member Huffman, Member Reynolds, Member Sykes

Honorable Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee:

Religion and Government are certainly very different Things, instituted for different Ends; the design of one being to promote our temporal Happiness; the design of the other to procure the Favor of God, and thereby the Salvation of our Souls. While these are kept distinct and apart, the Peace and welfare of Society is preserved, and the Ends of both are answered. By mixing them together, feuds, and animosities and persecutions have been raised, which have deluged the World in Blood, and disgraced human Nature.(1)

1. John Dickinson, Pennsylvania Journal, May 12, 1768, reprinted in The Founders on Religion, ed. James H. Huston (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 60-61.

Public school education is an Integral part of our government & a cornerstone of our democracy.

According to the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at George Washington University, report on the History, and Evolution of Public Education in the US, "The Founding Fathers maintain that the success of the fragile American democracy would depend on the competency of its citizens."

Our schools today have those same goals, to prepare & educate students to be competent citizens. The Mission Statement of Columbus city school Is that" Each student is highly educated, prepared for leadership and service and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community"

Our public schools face increasing challenges in an ever-changing world. Students and teachers days are full to overflowing with goals and objectives to achieve their mission statements.

Each student & their family attending public schools have their own values and their own religious traditions. They are free to pursue their unique religious beliefs & upbringing within their family time.

There is no justification for pulling children from the classroom for specific religious instruction.

This has always been the right and prerogative of each family to instruct their children in whatever religious tradition they see fit.

“Release time” where a student is excused from school to attend a course in religious instruction off of school property is an unnecessary addition to the burden of the public school system.

It takes away from their overall education with their classmates & it sets these children apart from their classmates.

It is not inclusive!

In the recent past, it quietly was made an option of a school district Board of Education to accommodate such a program. I’m sure it seemed innocuous to the few who were aware of what was being initiated!

They opened Pandora’s box!

There is now increasing pressure / competition from multiple organized religious groups to have their own “release time.”

But with the new wording in Senate Bill 293 it is a directive that they “shall” adopt this policy, not “may adopt this policy of early release for religious instruction. School boards will lose even more discretion.

I strongly oppose Senate Bill 293.

Put the lid back on the box!

Stop the increasing unnecessary demands on the public school system!

Let the teachers teach during the limited time they have students in the classroom and keep religious instruction afterschool, in the evenings and on the weekends where it belongs!

Respectfully submitted,
Helen Davidson McCarthy