

November 18, 2024

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 Jennifer Schrock, Board of Education Member from New Philadelphia City School District. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

New Philadelphia City Schools faced the potential infiltration of LifeWise Academy this fall. Our community went into an uproar, with most citizens opposing LifeWise Academy. Due to the current language in the ORC our board was able to vote to repeal our current RTRI policy as a measure to answer the community outcry. If SB 293 or HB 445 had passed prior to this, we would not have been able to make the decision most of our district wanted. If SB 293 passes, our district will not be able to protect our students from outside agencies wanting to take our students away from their educational experience. We would be forced to have a policy that would allow any outside entity claiming to be religious to have access to our children. New Philadelphia City Schools has a strict volunteer policy. Any adult who has regular contact with our students must complete a BCI, this includes parents who want to volunteer in their child's classroom. Many religious organizations do not make their volunteers complete a BCI, so the passage of SB 293 would allow our children to fall into the hands of potential predators. Outside entities, like LifeWise Academy, want to pull children out of their specials classes, like music, art and physical education; or take them during lunch or recess. Specials courses are vital in the development and education of the whole person and should not be taken away from children. For many of our students, lunch is the only healthy meal they receive. If they are forced to leave during lunch, they risk going hungry for the day. Recess is vital in gross motor development and pulling children away from that time stunts appropriate childhood development and could potentially negatively impact the child's physical health for the rest of their life.

Our community is mainly composed of members of our various local churches, so while religion is a priority to many families in our community, community members and several faith leaders oppose SB 293 and HB 445 because it should not be the responsibility of the public school system to monitor which students are leaving religious instruction. Religious instruction should be up to the family and a family practice, and SB 293 would force districts to allow outside agencies, such as LifeWise Academy, to take children off school property who do not believe in including parents in their program or giving them access to their curriculum.

School districts in Ohio already face enough challenges and there is already a strain on resources. Passing SB 293 will make it more difficult for teachers, school receptionists and principals to keep track of every student's schedule. Forcing districts to create a policy that is not needed to benefit the education of students is fiscally irresponsible as it will be a financial burden on the districts to create such policy.

I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill.

Thank you,

Jennifer Schrock