

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 James Black. I am a Christian from Franklin County Ohio. I am strongly opposed to SB 293 and its House counterpart HB 445.

My concerns are many though I will only highlight a few. While I respect people's right to practice their faith, I believe this bill could create serious problems for students and public schools. I know that my Christian beliefs do not line up with Lifewise version of Christian belief. So will these religious programs be allowed to teach content that's politically motivated or even harmful to some students? For example, could they promote anti-LGBTQ messages or take sides on political issues or candidates? Schools should be safe, inclusive places for everyone, and programs like this could undermine that.

Second, could these programs start pulling funding away from public schools for things like counseling, tutoring, or after-school activities? Public schools are already stretched thin, and they can't afford to lose resources to something that doesn't benefit all students.

Finally, what happens to the kids who don't join these programs? In some schools, if enough kids leave for a religious class, the ones left behind end up in study halls because there aren't enough students to hold other classes like art or music. That's not fair to the kids who choose not to participate—it feels like punishing them for opting out.

I believe education during the school day should be about academics, not religious instruction that could divide students or create inequities. I hope you'll consider these concerns and vote against this bill.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this [harmful/dangerous/unAmerican/etc.] bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.