

As a parent with children in elementary school, I'm writing today to ask you to not move SB 293 forward. Every minute of the school day is important, including what my children's school calls Related Arts (art, music, and gym), and also including lunch and recess, if for nothing other than the children's social bonds. The idea that schools should be forced by the government to allow students to leave during school hours for religious instruction is outrageous. Can schools safely manage students coming and going? School dropoff and pickup is messy enough as it is, why would we force schools to go through something like this multiple times a day?

Additionally, what entity is overseeing the safety of the religious programs, and that they're free of child predators? What about the bus drivers taking children to and from these programs? Are there laws about the safety of the buses themselves? One of the bigger providers of this religious instruction, LifeWise, has already had an incident where they hired someone who had previously been fired from a school for sending explicit messages to students.

Even if the people involved in teaching and transporting students aren't predators, who is to say that they're even qualified to teach? With public school teachers, they need a teaching license and a college degree and they are tested and vetted before they are let loose in the classroom. Who is overseeing the so-called teachers in these religious programs?

As a parent, I also have concerns about what is being taught by these religious groups. If they're associated with a specific denomination, I at least have a clue based on the teachings of that religious denomination. But a group that is non-denominational could be teaching children anything, with no oversight. Their curriculums are not even necessarily public.

Clearly this is a decision that should be left up to the individual school districts, like it has been in past years, and is not something that should be mandated by the state.