



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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Ohio Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee

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SB 293 – Opposition Testimony

November 19, 2024

Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee, my name is Scott DiMauro. I am a high school social studies teacher from Worthington with 16 years of classroom experience and currently serve as President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of our approximately 120,000 members, thank you for the opportunity to provide written opposition testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 293. The bill would require, instead of permit, locally elected school boards to establish religious release time policies that allow outside organizations to limit student learning in public schools by removing children from schools for off-site “religious instruction.”

OEA opposes SB 293 because it violates the Ohio governing principle of local control of public schools, hurts students by limiting and disrupting instructional time, and raises problematic legal and accountability questions for the public that have not been resolved.

OEA recommends maintaining current law, which protects local control and student instruction by allowing locally elected school board members to gauge the impact of religious release programs on student learning and levels of community support around this potentially divisive issue.

Loss of instructional time and disruption to school operations would be the primary outcomes of SB 293, both of which are contrary to the public’s interest in a thorough and efficient system of public schools. The fact that SB 293 exempts “core” subject areas is an acknowledgment that religious release programs are disruptive to classroom instruction. The bill’s exemption of “core” classes also ignores the well-known and growing awareness that school time not traditionally considered “core,” such as career-tech, art, music, and physical activity, are in fact extremely important aspects of a student’s overall well-being and vital to a well-rounded education. OEA advises against policies that reduce important school time for some students, while disrupting instruction for all students, by removing children from school buildings during the school day.

OEA also objects to the Ohio General Assembly using legal force to substitute its own judgement on religious release time in place of the judgement of locally elected officials closest to the



impacted school community. Using the mandate of state government to circumvent the resolution of legitimate debates that are local in nature will only increase divisiveness on this issue in our public schools. Districts across Ohio are reconsidering their religious release time policy after directly reviewing the impact of these programs on the district, students, and community.

Additional local harm would be caused by SB 293 by disarming the elected officials responsible for protecting schools and students from organizations that operate poorly run and disruptive religious release programs on unsuspecting communities. These harms include exposing school districts and local taxpayers to legal liabilities based on lack of accountability for student safety, well-being, and instructional content during religious release time transportation and programming.

In closing, SB 293 represents harmful public policy when it comes to supporting effective and well-run public schools. Given the rising concern amongst state policymakers about post-covid student absenteeism, passing bills that will only increase the time students are missing from school is the wrong direction for Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions related to OEA's position on SB 293.