



# Center FOR Christian Virtue

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To: Chair Andrew Brenner  
Vice Chair Sandra O'Brien  
Ranking Member Catherine Ingram  
Senate Education Committee

From: David Mahan  
Policy Director  
Center for Christian Virtue

Re: Support for SB293

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and esteemed members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is David Mahan and I am testifying on behalf of the Center for Christian Virtue, Ohio's largest Christian public policy organization. I am here today to support the passage of SB293, which will allow Ohio parents, rather than school board members, to decide whether or not their children can participate in religious and character-based instruction. For the purpose of this testimony I would like to focus on two key areas: 1. Current Ohio Law, and 2. Proven Results

#### Current Law:

Ohio law (ORC 3313.6022) currently permits districts to authorize release time for religious education for public school students under certain conditions. However, students are being shut out of this opportunity as some districts are deciding not to adopt a release time policy. This bill would remedy this problem for students by making this provision directive rather than permissive.

**The Ohio Constitution itself proclaims that, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being essential to good government, it shall be the duty of the general assembly... to encourage schools and the means of instruction.** Passage of SB293 is one manner in which the GA can uphold this constitutional directive without actively getting involved with religion in any way.

In light of the Ohio Revised Code, and our state constitution, not only should parents have the right and authority to allow their children to participate in release time religious instruction, the law explicitly supports their right to do so. SB293



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simply changes one word (“may” to “shall”), in order to prevent school districts from infringing on that right.

## Proven Results:

Over the past several weeks there has been much discussion regarding one particular Westerville school board meeting in which a popular RTRI program was discontinued after 2 years of programming. Folks on both sides have been sharing their perspectives about how the turnout of that one particular meeting justifies support, one way or the other. As I listened to comments about how many people were in attendance and what percentage of attendees were parents, I got the sense that advocates on both sides seemed to realize that if we truly want to gauge the success of the program, the groups we really need to be listening to are the parents and teachers from participating schools. In 2024 alone, the organization in question at the meeting (Lifewise Academy) served 452 Ohio schools, and over 30,000 Ohio students, representing thousands of Ohio parents. A survey of over 2,646 parents revealed that over 99% feel that “Lifewise helps their children make better decisions, and that they recommend the program to other parents. When 769 educators from participating schools were surveyed, 90% agreed that “their school and students benefit from the Lifewise program.”<sup>1</sup> While I appreciate all those who took the time to attend that Westerville School Board meeting, any support for or against the program pales in comparison to the overwhelming support of the 30,000 students, thousands of parents, and hundreds of teachers that clearly see the benefits of the release time religious instruction being implemented in their schools. One urban elementary school principal who allows for release time religious instruction shared the following insights:

*“[This release-time program] has made a positive impact on student attendance, behavior and social emotional well-being. It provides confidence and a sense of belonging for students. They have learned compassion. Our school’s daily attendance goal is 90% or above each day. Consistently, on the days our students participate in [the program], our 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades meet or surpass our goal. Disciplinary infractions for students who participate have decreased by 50%.”*

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<https://lifewise.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Survey-Results.pdf><https://lifewise.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Survey-Results.pdf>



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At a time when good news and successful results from our public schools seems to be increasingly rare, results like these cannot be overlooked or overshadowed by the well-coordinated efforts of a few ideologically motivated activist groups or school board members. We urge this committee to favorably refer SB293 to the full House for passage.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of this proposed legislation. If the committee has any questions for me, I will do my best to answer them at this time.

*The Center for Christian Virtue (CCV) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that endeavors to create an Ohio where God's blessings of life, family, and religious freedom are treasured, respected, and protected. [www.ccv.org](http://www.ccv.org) -- (513) 733-5775*