



November 19, 2024
Senate Education Committee
Opposition Testimony on SB 293
Melissa Cropper, President of Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony opposing SB 293. The Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT) represents teachers in traditional and charter schools, support staff, higher education faculty and staff, library employees, and social workers.

OFT's K-12 members work in some of the largest school districts in the state, like Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Toledo, and in some of the smallest school districts in the state, like Vanlue, New Knoxville, and Lordstown. There aren't many "one size fits all" solutions to the challenges our students, schools, and communities face. That's why local control, guided by direct input from parents, is a bedrock value for public education in Ohio.

The current law, allowing school districts to choose whether or not they want to allow religious release time, gives parents and communities the choice of determining what is best for their children. Whether in favor or in opposition to religious release time, right now parents can make their case at a school board meeting, organize with other parents, and elect local school board members who share their point of view. Parents currently have the power to influence this important decision regarding their children's education.

By mandating every school enact a controversial policy that touches on deeply held beliefs, SB 293 would take power out of the hands of parents and taxpayers.

Religious release time can lead to a myriad of problems for a school district to solve: How do you ensure student safety when students are in the hands of an unvetted third party during the day? How do you prevent a slippery slope of needing to allow students to leave school for other non-academic reasons? What impact does release time have on our ability to offer electives and provide a well-rounded education? How do teachers and staff deal with the disruptions caused by students coming and going during the day? How does using lunchtime and recess for off-site learning impact a young child's ability to focus on other subjects during the rest of the day?

If school boards, which are accountable directly to parents and voters, choose to take on these problems in order to facilitate religious release time, then that is their choice. But these questions, these obstacles to a quality public education, shouldn't be mandated for every school district in the state.

I urge you to stand up for local control of our schools and oppose SB 293.