



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

The Board of Public Education Partners (PEP) is opposed to Ohio Senate Bill 293, which will require public school districts to create policies that could potentially release students to leave school to attend courses in religious instruction, conducted by private religious entities, off school district grounds during the required school day.

Aside from a lack of transparency, how can there be any accountability for these religious instruction programs concerning the potential problems not addressed in SB 293?

NBC News published a story about [a religious instruction program called LifeWise Academy](#), which operates under a pair of little-known U.S. Supreme Court rulings that allow for off-campus religious instruction during school hours. Many school advocates around the state were extremely concerned after reading this article and posed a detailed list of thoughtful questions concerning transparency and accountability for these programs.

Please have serious discussions with your colleagues about these concerns to help guide you in determining the necessity of this bill.

Will every religious release program be allowed to participate?

Will there be any minimum qualifications or credentialing for religious release programs?

Can anyone start a small religious release program and use it to remove kids from school during the day?

What happens if a nontraditional religion, such as Church of Wicca, Neo-Paganism, Satanic Temple, etc., wants to bring a religious release program into some school districts?

How will the state of Ohio hold religious release programs accountable for their curriculum?

How will these religious release programs affect the required school day?

Governor DeWine has been promoting research showing that if a student picks up a cell phone and interacts with it, it takes 50 minutes for that student's distraction to subside. Won't leaving for a religious release program distract students for the entire day?

If religious release programs only take place during specialized/elective time, won't the state be further limiting subjects like art, PE, music, or library/media that help children grow into healthy, well-rounded adults?

If these programs only take place during lunch and recess, won't children miss out on opportunities to play and grow with their peers?

How will the state of Ohio hold every religious release program accountable concerning disruption of the school day?

What will the state do to protect Ohio children?

Will religious release program directors, staff, and volunteers continue to be allowed to bypass FBI background checks required for public schools? How can we be sure the religious release time program leaders and their employees do not have criminal records?

Will religious release programs have epi-pens on site? Defibrillators?

Who ensures religious release program leaders do not give out treats containing nuts and allergens?

How will the state of Ohio hold every religious release program accountable for the safety of our school children?

Who will oversee the marketing practices for religious release programs?

Will programs like LifeWise be permitted to send kids back to school with candy, toys, presents, and other incentives to make their classmates jealous and increase enrollment in religious release programs?

Will programs like LifeWise be permitted to take kids on field trips to amusement parks, zoos, arcades, etc. during the school day and then send them back to school to make their classmates jealous and increase enrollment in religious release programs?

Won't the recruitment strategies used by religious release programs lead to strained student relationships between students who attend the program and those who do not, thereby creating additional social/interpersonal barriers in our classrooms?

How will the state of Ohio hold every religious release program accountable in terms of not going further than the law allows while promoting their program and trying to convince kids to attend?

What about political and/or religious indoctrination?

Will religious release programs have the authority to focus on politically motivated content that is potentially harmful to students?

Will religious release programs be permitted to divert funding away from public schools for religious counseling, after-school programs, tutoring, or other "services provided" that are not specifically part of the release program?

Why should religious release programs have the state-sanctioned authority to use our public schools to bring Ohio's youngest citizens into certain faith traditions?

How will the state of Ohio hold every religious release program accountable for not using schools to draw children into a faith whose members overwhelmingly vote as their church advises?

Religious instruction programs do not need to be offered **during school hours**. Our children's safety and well-being are of utmost importance, and the lack of transparency and accountability of such programs is very troubling.

Ohio Senate Bill 293 is another unnecessary policy that wastes the precious time of our legislators who strive to do meaningful work for the people of Ohio. Please oppose SB 293!