

Good Afternoon Chairman Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, and Ranking Member Brown. I will be testifying today on behalf of both myself and my joint sponsor, Representative Baldrige, who had a medical procedure early this morning, and I wish him a speedy recovery. My colleague and I are pleased to present the Ohio Antiquities Act, a bill which will help local communities to protect heritage and historic monuments from removal and or destruction.

Many political subdivisions have come under pressure or have been legally threatened by organizations to remove historic religious symbols from their buildings, grounds, or other areas of display. These legal threats come of way by “freedom of religion” groups that demand the historic religious symbols be removed or else legal actions be taken against the displaying body. The religious symbols are often historical in nature, having been displayed for decades and are not an attempt to force the establishment of religious principles upon any member of society.

In many such cases, these “freedom from religion” organizations are domiciled outside of the State of Ohio and have no inherent commitment to the betterment of Ohio. Rather, their agenda is driven by their own specific ideology which in many times is contradictory or antagonistic to the values of the community or organization being pressured to remove such artifacts.

Ohio Political Subdivisions should be making decisions regarding historical monuments. Elected officials such as city councils, township trustees, county commissioners, and school board members should be the decision maker when it comes to constitutionally permissible historic displays. In my local community, the New Philadelphia City Schools were required to remove a little-known placard depicting the Ten Commandments that had been given as a gift by the NPHS Class of 1926. See the Attached Photograph. The School caved under legal pressure, not because of a legal argument, but rather the threat of litigation.

Ohio Communities must preserve the past to better understand our future and from where we came. By passing this Bill, the Ohio General Assembly will allow the permissive authority of the Ohio Attorney General to represent Ohioans and protect historical artifacts that allow us to better understand our history.