

Chair Fowler-Arthur, Vice Chair Odisio, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Elizabeth Crawford. I am an educator in Southeast Ohio and a member of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies.

I strongly oppose House Bill 486, the “Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act

HB 486 undermines the current curriculum requirements for Ohio’s students. Students are already tasked with learning and understanding the relationship between religion and society. Currently, students are tasked with evaluating all major religions in relation to society as a whole. With the diversity of students in Ohio, focusing on positive impacts religion has had on American History would not be an accurate representation of our history. An example of this would be during the time of early settlements, explorers used Christianity as their reason for conquering whole groups of people. We know now through excavations and research that civilizations originally deemed “inferior” were extremely educated and skilled. However, because they didn’t present themselves like Europeans, they were looked down upon and taken advantage of in the name of spreading Christianity.

Another example from my time as an 8th grade US History teacher was when England settled in what is now Virginia. The King did not send them for religious purposes, but to find gold. The Pilgrims and Puritans landed in what is now Massachusetts and if you didn’t believe how they did, you were banished from society. You should ask Roger Williams, Thomas Hooker and Anne Hutchinson about that. They all disagreed with the majority Christian religion, and were kicked out. We are already teaching the truth about religious impacts on American History, but not the story I believe HB 486 wants us to tell.

Teachers in Ohio are already teaching the complete truth about America, faults and all. That includes the Christian justification for race-based enslavement of people from Africa and the removal of American Indians to reservations and boarding schools. We have used Christianity to justify a lot over America’s short 250 years. What I believe this bill aims to do is once again undermine the current content standards that were put through a rigorous process prior to state approval. This bill wants teachers to tell a certain story and that sounds like indoctrination from the right wing in power. Our students do not deserve to be told untruths or only part of the story. They want civil discourse in an environment where they feel safe to do so. John Dewey believed that public school classrooms were the heart of democracy. We have lost sight of that because we continue to persecute the group of people practicing democracy in real time and that is teachers.

I urge you to consider dropping this bill. Not every Ohioan has a tie to Charlie Kirk or believes in what he did. When the right accuses the left of indoctrination, you go behind and do the same thing for your own beliefs. Our children should not be caught in the crossfire of adult issues. Allow teachers to do their jobs and you do yours. It is time for the micromanaging to end.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.