Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brenner, and Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Duane Moore. I am a long-time social studies teacher, curriculum specialist, and doctoral student in educational leadership. I have spent my professional career working with students and advocating for teachers in Ohio. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 486.

This bill proposes to legislate the inclusion of a narrowly framed narrative into the required curriculum of Ohio's public classrooms. I fundamentally oppose this approach. HB 486 mandates a strictly positive portrayal of religion's role in American history, which constrains the professional discretion teachers need to navigate the dynamic realities of classroom instruction. Students ask complex, probing questions. Teachers must be free to respond with nuance, evidence, and balance – not with a narrow, state-sanctioned instructional prescription.

Moreover, by embedding this content into the core curriculum – required for all Ohio students – the bill positions students as a functionally captive audience. This raises serious concerns about the specter of indoctrination that all of us agree has no place in Ohio's classrooms. While the bill professes that its provisions do not constitute "proselytization," the effect of codifying a one-sided narrative of religious influence into mandatory instruction comes perilously close. It risks violating the very constitutional principles it claims to uphold.

Let me offer a constructive alternative.

Rather than inserting this material into core U.S. history instruction, the legislature should consider recommending it as the foundation for a dedicated elective – perhaps titled *Religion in American Political Thought*. Such a course could explore these themes with depth and integrity, without compromising the neutrality required of classroom teachers.

The topics outlined in HB 486 – ranging from the Mayflower Compact to the Black Robe Regiment – are not without historical relevance. But they are already embedded in Ohio's existing learning standards. What the bill proposes is not new content - it's an intentional emphasizing of already existing curriculum. Consider the following examples:

- **Pilgrims and Religious Motivation for Colonization**: Grade 8 Content Statement 2 requires instruction on how North America was colonized for both economic and religious reasons.
- **Northwest Ordinance and Religious Language**: Grade 4 Content Statement 5 mandates study of the Northwest Ordinance, including its reference to "religion, morality, and knowledge."
- **Religion in the Civil Rights Movement**: High School American History Content Statement 18 requires coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, including the religious leadership of figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- **Religious Liberty and the First Amendment**: High School American Government Content Statement 8 requires instruction on the Bill of Rights, including the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses.

- **Roger Williams and Church-State Separation:** Grade 8 Content Statement 2 includes religious motivations for colonization, providing context for figures like Roger Williams and the origins of church-state separation.

These examples show that the bill's proposed content is already present – and required – within Ohio's standards. The issue has never been one of omission.

If this intended emphasis is the point, then we already have a vehicle in Ohio's public schools for dedicated and intentional focus: electives. As someone who taught electives for over two decades, I will always support the growth of electives. Electives empower educators with specialized expertise to teach courses they are passionate about. They also give students meaningful choices in how they fulfill their social studies graduation requirements.

I think that this bill could give a full-throated endorsement of electives in our schools. Not only this elective, but a full spectrum of electives: *African American History*, *Latino/Chicano Studies*, *Psychology*, *Sociology*, *Women's Studies*, *Gender Studies*, *Cinema and Culture*, and (possibly), *Religion in American Political Thought*. These courses enrich our civic discourse and reflect the diversity of Ohio's students and communities.

When offered as electives, curricula like the one proposed in HB 486 can be open to compete in the marketplace of ideas. This honors not only Ohio's tradition of home rule, but also the central arguments of the bill's namesake. In communities, residents can engage in meaningful dialogue with their school boards about their desire to teach these ideas to their children. Within the schoolhouse, students can "vote with their feet," choosing courses that resonate with their interests and values.

This approach supports the plurality already embedded in Ohio's standards. It allows for robust exploration of religion's role in American history – without elevating one tradition above others or prescribing a singular interpretation.

Additionally, I think that HB 486 should not be a bill at all. If the General Assembly wishes to encourage the study of religion's influence on American history, it could issue a concurrent resolution – similar to the concurrent resolution this House already adopted encouraging students to read the Declaration of Independence for the 250th anniversary.

Ohio's students deserve a social studies education that is rigorous, inquiry-driven, and sound under both Ohio and America's constitutions. HB 486 undermines that core belief. It duplicates existing standards, disrupts instructional coherence, and risks politicizing the classroom. I urge the committee to reject this bill and instead support pluralistic, locally governed, and elective-based approaches to curriculum development.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.