



Ohio

Council for the Social Studies

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice-Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and Members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dr. Sarah Kaka, and I am President of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS), the state's largest professional coalition of social studies educators. OCSS urges you to oppose House Bill 486.

OCSS supports rigorous, constitutional instruction about religion's roles in American history. Our teachers already do this every year under Ohio's Learning Standards and model curriculum. Your own bill analysis shows HB 486 would add statutory language inviting instruction on the "positive impacts of religion," with an extended, state-selected list centered "particularly [on] Christianity."

That framing conflicts with how Ohio expects students to learn history, which is through evidence, multiple perspectives, and inquiry, and not through a pre-labeled narrative. Our official OCSS position statement explains why this bill is redundant to the standards, destabilizes scope and sequence, and signals a one-sided treatment that undermines neutrality.

As such, I want to address three core claims made in sponsor testimony.

1) "This bill merely clarifies what's already allowed."

Representative Click states HB 486 "does not create a new law... [and] does not impose new regulations or mandates," purporting only to remove "invisible shackles."

If neutral teaching about religion is already permitted—as he acknowledges—then putting a favorable frame ("positive impacts") and a curated list into statute is unnecessary at best and confusing at worst. The bill's findings also go far beyond "clarification," declaring an "accurate... account of the influence of Christianity" is imperative and embedding branded sections as the "Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act."

That is not a neutral reminder; it is policy direction with viewpoint language, which invites implementation disputes and legal risk for districts.

2) "Teachers have expressed fear"

Sponsors claim educators feel prohibited by groups like the ACLU or by administrators, and even say a superintendent told them it was "against the law."

Respectfully, fear anecdotes are not a policy foundation. The better evidence is what Ohio actually requires and supports today. Our standards already cover religion's historical roles—from colonial motivations and the First Amendment to abolition, the Civil War era, and the modern Civil Rights Movement—and they require inquiry with multiple perspectives. Our position statement maps the bill's entire exemplar list to existing Grade 5, Grade 8, American History, and American Government content statements.

That is why OCSS calls the bill redundant of the standards and destabilizing to sequencing when it says these topics may be inserted “whenever American history is discussed.”

If there are isolated misunderstandings at the district level, the fix is guidance—not statute that prefers a positive frame for one tradition. Ohio teachers need clear, constitutional professional development and model lessons, not a law that will be read as signaling a required favorable treatment.

3) “This restores honesty and depth by centering Christianity’s positive influence.”

Representative Dovilla explicitly frames HB 486 as permission to teach “the positive influence of religion, particularly Christianity, on the development of our nation’s ideals,” citing Tom Holland and Miles Smith to argue for primacy.

Social studies teachers absolutely examine religious ideas, movements, and actors—from the Mayflower Compact to the Great Awakenings to abolition and Dr. King. But we do so using sourcing, corroboration, and multiple perspectives, not a statute that pre-labels examples as “positive.” OCSS’s position warns that such language “sends a signal that certain interpretations of history are preferred,” contradicting inquiry-based pedagogy and chilling full, balanced treatment of complex episodes.

What would HB 486 actually do in classrooms?

Because the bill embeds a named act, findings about Christianity’s special role, and a long exemplar list, teachers and parents will understandably treat it as a state-endorsed narrative, not a neutral permission slip. That creates three predictable harms:

- Instructional confusion. The bill’s “positive impacts” phrasing blurs the line between neutral, standards-aligned instruction about religion and a state-preferred narrative, leaving teachers uncertain about what is permissible and how to present counter-evidence.
- Local-control erosion. A legislator-written catalog crowds the standards-to-curriculum process Ohio has long entrusted to educators, higher-ed partners, and communities.

- Legal exposure. Favorable, tradition-specific framing in statute invites viewpoint disputes and complaints. Even meritless claims cost districts in counsel time and training. OCSS wants teachers teaching, not defending ambiguous statutory signals.

A constructive alternative

If the goal is comfort with constitutional, non-devotional teaching about religion's roles, there's a cleaner path: issue state guidance that reaffirms neutrality, inquiry, and multiple perspectives under our existing standards, with optional model lessons co-developed with educators and historians. That accomplishes what sponsors say they want without importing a favorable frame or politicizing curriculum. Our position statement lays out this amendment-ready language.

In closing, Ohio students deserve the best of social studies: complexity, evidence, and open classrooms that welcome every learner. HB 486 is redundant to what we already teach, conflicts with how we are supposed to teach it, and risks replacing inquiry with a state-favored narrative.

On behalf of OCSS, I ask you to reject HB 486.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer questions.