

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 486

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Lucas George, and I am an 8th grade social studies teacher in my eighth year. I currently serve as Legislative Liaison for the Ohio Council for the Social Studies. I am a 2019 James Madison Fellow and the 2022 Gilder Lehrman Ohio History Teacher of the Year. I have also served as adjunct education faculty at Wittenberg University.

I oppose House Bill 486 because it is redundant to what we already teach and poorly written in ways that will harm instruction.

This Bill Is Redundant

Ohio's teachers already teach about religion's influence on American history every single year: the Pilgrims and Mayflower Compact, religious motivations for settlement, the Great Awakenings, religious leaders in abolition, Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement, Washington's Farewell Address, and the First Amendment debates.

We teach these topics because Ohio's Learning Standards already require it. OCSS's position statement includes an appendix mapping every single example in this bill to existing content standards in grades 5, 8, American History, and American Government. The content is already there. The instruction is already happening.

This Bill Bypasses Best Practices

The bill says these topics may be taught "whenever American history is discussed," but provides no guidance on grade level, timing, or integration. We work with a carefully sequenced curriculum. This bill would have us insert items from a legislative list at random points throughout the year, creating massive redundancy and confusion. Does "whenever American history is discussed" mean during Ohio history in fourth grade? World history in sixth? Current events? The bill provides no answers.

House Bill 486 bypasses Ohio's curriculum development process entirely. That process involves parents, students, educators, content experts, higher education faculty, and community stakeholders. This bill was written without consulting Ohio social studies teachers, without evidence-gathering about classroom practice, and without review by historians or curriculum specialists.

Ohio's Learning Standards are built around inquiry—students analyzing primary sources, evaluating multiple perspectives, and drawing evidence-based conclusions. While this bill's language is permissive, putting specific examples into statute with particular framing sends a signal about what the state expects. Even "may" language in law gets interpreted as guidance, especially with a twenty-item list and legislative findings about what's "imperative."

We Can Do Better for Our 250th

Next year, our nation celebrates its 250th anniversary. What an incredible opportunity for Ohio to come together and strengthen civic education for every student in a spirit of unity and shared purpose.

If there are real concerns about how religion is taught in Ohio schools, let's address them properly. Let's bring teachers, parents, historians, and community members to the table. Let's identify any genuine gaps through collaboration and evidence, not anecdotes. Let's develop guidance and resources that support constitutional, rigorous instruction within our existing standards. That's how we honor our history and mark this milestone in a way that unifies rather than divides.

House Bill 486 is redundant and bypasses the educators, parents, and communities it claims to serve. As we approach America's 250th birthday, Ohio students deserve a curriculum built through collaboration, taught by trusted professionals, and grounded in the inquiry-based standards we've spent years developing.

I urge you to oppose House Bill 486 and instead work with Ohio's educators to strengthen civic education in a way that truly serves all our students.

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