Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amber Lyn Drabik Martin, I am a constituent in Delaware County, Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to H.B. 486, also referred to as the "Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act."

I oppose this bill for three core reasons: it blurs the separation of church and state, it rewrites American history through selective curation and factual errors, and it undermines balanced, standards-aligned education for Ohio's students.

First, church–state separation.
Public schools must be neutral in matters of religion. That is not hostility to faith; it is a constitutional guardrail that protects every family whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, secular, and others. H.B. 486 is not a neutral academic framework. By design, it elevates Christianity's "positive impacts" and offers lists of talking points that privilege one tradition over all others. That is a viewpoint preference, not a civics lesson. The bill invites classroom litigation, community division, and administrative confusion.

Second, historical accuracy and integrity.
We want students to learn about religion's influence in American life, and they should, but accurately and in context. This bill's "illustrative" list does not do that. It presents myth as history, often through selective or false claims.

For example, it states that Benjamin Franklin's call for prayer at the Constitutional Convention "was followed" by the hiring of chaplains. In reality, the Convention debated Franklin's motion but did not adopt it; no chaplains were hired, and no formal prayers were held. The bill also claims Franklin told Thomas Paine to "burn" *The Age of Reason*, a book published years after Franklin's death, and it treats the so-called "Black Robe Regiment" as if it were an official military body, when in fact the term was coined long after the Revolution as a piece of patriotic folklore. These are not small mistakes; they are factual errors that would fail a basic source check. When the State writes those mistakes into law, it pressures teachers to teach mythology, not history.

The bill also points to "the appeals to divine power and protection embedded in the Declaration of Independence" as evidence of a Christian foundation. But the authors of the Declaration were, by and large, Deists—men who believed in a Creator but rejected the notion of divine intercession in human affairs. Their references to "Nature's God" and "Divine Providence" were metaphoric and philosophical, not doctrinal. They were expressing Enlightenment ideas about natural rights, not invoking a state religion.

Most of the Founders were Christians by culture, not by creed. They were born into Christian denominations but intellectually committed to reason, liberty, and the clear separation of church and state, a separation they viewed as essential to the survival of a free government.

Public schools can constitutionally teach about religion, but only in a neutral and balanced way that informs rather than promotes. When the State elevates one faith's narrative above all others, it crosses from education into indoctrination, and that is unconstitutional.

Third, balanced education for Ohio's children.
Good history instruction is inquiry-driven. It asks students to weigh evidence, consider multiple causes, and understand complexity: the Enlightenment and evangelical revivals; dissenters and establishment; the roles of Indigenous peoples, Black Americans, immigrants, labor, women, and religious minorities; ideals and contradictions. H.B. 486 narrows that lens to pre-selected "positive" episodes about one tradition while glossing over conflicts, exclusions, and plural voices that are essential to a full American story. Students deserve better than a state-mandated highlight reel.

Policy risk and practical impact.
Adopting a one-sided religious narrative in public classrooms invites constitutional challenges, burdens districts with training and compliance uncertainties, and diverts scarce instructional time from tested standards. Teachers do not need the Legislature to script talking points; they need the freedom and responsibility to teach history with evidence, nuance, and balance.

A better path.
If the General Assembly wants to strengthen civic and historical literacy, focus on primary-source analysis, media literacy, and robust coverage of the Constitution, Reconstruction, the civil rights era, and civic participation without prescribing sectarian narratives. Encourage academically vetted materials that treat religious influences, including Christianity, accurately and alongside other intellectual and social currents, in line with Ohio's learning standards.

In short: our kids need history class, not heritage catechism. Please reject H.B. 486.

Sincerely,

Amber Lyn Drabik Martin