



October 21, 2025 | Testimony in Opposition to HB 486 | House Education Committee

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Equality Ohio in opposition to House Bill 486, also known as the Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act. Equality Ohio is a statewide organization that has worked for two decades to ensure lived and legal equality for LGBTQ+ Ohioans. We advocate for fair treatment, safety, and dignity for every person, regardless of who they are or whom they love.

HB 486 would permit educators in public schools and state institutions to “provide instruction on the positive impacts of religion [specifically Christianity] on American history.” While the bill stops short of mandating such lessons, it unmistakably privileges one faith tradition and encourages teachers to present it only in a positive light. That framing may seem harmless, even uplifting, but it subtly undermines the purpose of teaching history itself: to examine our collective past in its full complexity—the triumphs and the tragedies, and to learn from it.

As James Baldwin wrote, “American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.” Our students deserve that whole truth—not the selective comfort of a single narrative. When the State suggests that only the “positive” influences of one religion are appropriate for instruction, it discourages honest discussion of the pain and exclusion that faith, at times, has caused.

For LGBTQ+ people, that history is not theoretical. Christianity has inspired extraordinary acts of compassion—churches that fed the hungry, clergy who marched for civil rights, and faith leaders who today bless same-sex unions and affirm queer youth. But it has also been invoked to justify persecution, criminalization, and conversion therapy. LGBTQ+ Ohioans know what it means to be told we are “loved” yet unworthy, to be prayed over instead of listened to, and even to be driven from our families, our schools, or our churches in the name of salvation.

To portray Christianity’s impact on American life as only positive would erase those experiences and misrepresent the historical record. From colonial laws punishing “sodomy,” to 20th-century



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campaigns portraying gay and trans people as threats to moral order, to present-day efforts to restrict affirming healthcare and education, religious rhetoric has too often been the language of our exclusion.

That truth does not indict faith itself—many LGBTQ+ individuals are people of faith—but it requires that we teach honestly. The same churches that once condemned difference are today home to pastors who perform same-sex marriages, to congregations that host Pride celebrations, and to believers who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us in the fight for equality. That full story—faith’s capacity for both harm and healing—is what students must learn if they are to understand our full history and humanity.

By encouraging only one side of that story, HB 486 risks chilling educators from exploring the rest. Teachers may fear that acknowledging our country’s darker brushes with religion—from the forced conversion of Indigenous peoples, to religiously justified slavery and segregation, to discrimination against women and LGBTQ+ people—could be viewed as violating legislative intent. The bill thus pressures classrooms toward a state-endorsed orthodoxy, which runs counter to both academic integrity and the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious neutrality.

Education thrives when it invites inquiry, not ideology. The role of public schools is not to affirm any single creed, but to equip students to think critically about how belief, doubt, and power have shaped our nation. Faith has profoundly influenced American life—that is beyond question—but it has done so in ways both redemptive and destructive. A responsible curriculum acknowledges both.

Equality Ohio respects the millions of Ohioans for whom Christianity is a source of comfort and moral guidance. Our concern is not with faith, but with fairness. LGBTQ students, non-Christian students, and students of no faith should all be able to learn about our shared history without feeling that the government has chosen sides in matters of belief or identity.

Chair Fowler Arthur and members of the Committee, we urge you to reject HB 486 or amend it to ensure that any instruction about religion in American history be academically balanced,



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historically accurate, and inclusive of all perspectives—including those whose stories have too often been left out. The measure as written suggests that only one faith, and only its virtues, are worthy of state recognition. That is not education; it is endorsement.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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