Chairwoman Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House Education Committee; thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 486. My name is Tom Traini, and I am currently in my 29th year of teaching in the public schools. I teach orchestra and music theory, and I also serve as an adjunct instructor with Columbus State Community College, teaching a College Credit Plus music history course.

Christian music plays a vital role in my daily lessons. My music history students trace the Latin Mass across 1,300 years of music history, my music theory students study the harmonic structures of Bach chorales and their relationship to the text, and my orchestra students are immersed in the rich artistic and historical tradition of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus. The absence of any of these lessons, just a few of the many overtly Christian music lessons, would create a void in the curriculum that undermines the integrity and completeness of music education itself.

Fortunately, numerous Supreme Court cases have affirmed the legitimacy of including and acknowledging Christian music in the public school classroom. These include Florey v. Sioux Falls School District (1979), Doe v. Duncanville Independent School District (1995), and Bauchman v. West High School (1997). These cases have established a precedent that allows me to give my students a complete understanding of Western classical music - including its Christian influences - without fear of reprimand or retribution. Furthermore, there is no stipulation in these rulings requiring me to also teach poorly written sacred music for the sake of balance or neutrality. These rulings also affirm that teaching the great works of music that have Christian influences or lyrics is not an endorsement of Christianity.

For this reason, I stand in support of House Bill 486. Accomplished history teachers deserve the same assurance that I have in music education - that when they teach the full story of America, they will not be accused of proselytizing or favoring one religion, but recognized for achieving secular educational goals through the honest teaching of our Christian heritage.

Historical facts like those outlined in House Bill 486 are integral parts of the story of America. Neglecting to teach these truths leaves students with an incomplete understanding of our nation's founding and its rise to prominence in the world - just as neglecting the Christian works of Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven would leave my students with an incomplete understanding of music. The lack of legislative clarity on the ability to teach these historical facts does a disservice to Ohio's students. The passage of House Bill 486 would provide that clarity.

Why would an educator be concerned about acknowledging the Christian influence on American history? Consider these statements:

- "Words in this text that encourage the positive impact of Christianity should be removed."
- Or, if Christianity is part of the lesson, it should be mentioned like this, "*some* Europeans who arrived centuries ago on our shores were motivated *in part* by religious freedom".
- Or, describing the contents of this bill as a "Christian nationalist fever dream".

These aren't quotes from some fringe blogger writing from his mother's basement - these were spoken or submitted to this committee just two weeks ago by representatives of mainstream

organizations. Opponents of this bill acknowledge that these historical facts **CAN be taught**, but their words reveal a belief that they **SHOULDN'T be taught**. Ironically, their testimony proves why this bill is needed.

The main concern voiced by opponents appears to be that this bill will upset a supposed "equilibrium" of positive and negative teachings about Christianity. In their testimonies, they cited examples of horrible things done in the name of Christianity, often justified by misusing the Bible. Those events did happen - but the individuals who committed them were wrong about the Bible, either unintentionally or, more often, deliberately.

Are opponents suggesting that these distortions of Christianity should be used to counterbalance the great contributions Christianity has made to America? For example, should Charles Manson be seen as a reflection of Christianity because his followers believed he was Christ? Should the 9/11 hijackers represent the entire Muslim community because they attacked in the name of Islam? Should Native Americans who practiced child sacrifice and cannibalism be viewed as representative of all indigenous peoples because they did those things in the name of their gods? Of course not. We recognize these as misinterpretations and perversions of otherwise peaceful beliefs. Yet the opponents of this bill would have us believe that slave owners of the 18th and 19th centuries are representative Christians.

In the absence of clear legal precedent or legislation, when history teachers and professors weigh whether or not to address historical facts rooted in Christianity, are we to expect them to wade through a maze of ambiguous court rulings - running their lesson plans through the "Separation test," the "three-prong Lemon test," the "Endorsement test," and the "Coercion test" to determine whether a statement of theirs is at odds with the Establishment Clause? Of course not. They'll simply take the "safe" route - one that school boards, teachers' unions, the ACLU and the OCSS prefer: "Just leave that part out. You wouldn't want to end up in the news."

This approach leaves students with an incomplete - or worse, distorted - view of the American story. The passage of House Bill 486 would provide a clear and much-needed solution to this problem through legislative guidance. I urge this committee to send this bill to the full House with a favorable report.