



HB 486 – Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act

Before the House Education Committee

Belpre City Schools, Washington County
Jeffrey S. Greenley, Superintendent

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Good Morning Chair Fowler, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and Members of the House Education Committee. My name is Jeffrey Greenley and I currently serve as Superintendent of Belpre City School District. Thank you for the opportunity to provide Proponent Testimony regarding House Bill 486. I come before you today not only as a superintendent of schools with responsibility for implementing state education policy, but also as a former history teacher who has stood in front of students and grappled with how to teach about Christianity's profound influence on American history in a way that is both accurate, inclusive and constitutionally appropriate.

I want to begin by acknowledging what I believe is a legitimate concern underlying this legislation: teachers need clear statutory language that provides them with support and legal cover when teaching about Christianity's role in American history. As a history teacher, I experienced firsthand the uncertainty that can arise when educators wonder whether discussing the religious motivations of abolitionists, the faith traditions that informed the Civil Rights

Movement, or the theological debates at America's founding might expose them or their districts to legal challenge. This uncertainty can have a chilling effect, leading to the very kind of educational impoverishment that shortchanges our students. Moreover, in our current climate of heightened scrutiny of curriculum and culture wars, clear legislative guidance serves an important democratic function. When communities are polarized about what should be taught in schools, statutory clarity can provide a framework that protects both educators and the educational mission itself.

HB 486 attempts to address a real educational gap—the underteaching or mishandling of Christianity's role in American history. Some could argue that, as written, the bill risks replacing one problem with another. Instead of prohibiting Christianity's contributions through omission, it could discriminate among citizens by suggesting that one religious tradition's contributions merit special positive emphasis by the state. I don't think that is the intent of the legislation here, and I'm even more sure that this would not be how the legislation would play out in real classrooms. Rather, the bill would clarify for educators that Christianity can be treated on an equal playing field among the other cultural and religious affiliations that are explored in our curriculum. I know it seems counterintuitive given Christianity's historical role as the dominant religion in the United States. But my experience in schools is that educators might stress more about discussing Christianity in a classroom than they would Judaism, Buddhism, Islam or any of the other rich religious institutions across the world because of its perceived dominant position in the United States and the desire to be even handed. The clarity of this bill ensures that educators can discuss the contributions of Christianity to our rich American tapestry.

Before I conclude, I just want to briefly acknowledge what I believe to be the constitutionality of HB 486. I recognize that the legal landscape has shifted significantly since *Kennedy v. Bremerton* (2022) replaced the *Lemon* test with a "history and tradition" analysis. Under this newer framework, I believe teaching about Christianity's historical role in American society has strong constitutional footing, as such instruction has deep roots in American educational practice.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I support the intent behind HB 486. Teachers do need clearer guidance and stronger support for teaching about Christianity's undeniable role in shaping American history and culture. The intent here is to ensure Christianity's role can be taught on an equal playing field as all others. This message is consistent with the mutual respect that citizens in a multicultural democracy owe one another.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey S. Greenley, EdD, JD, MBA
Superintendent Belpre City Schools
Former U.S. History Teacher