Members of the Ohio House Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Nick Denton and I serve as a teaching professor and education researcher at The Ohio State University, a church council vice president, and a den leader working closely with students from a wide diversity of family structures including single-parent homes, kinship care families, blended families, foster youth, and LGBTQ+ households. Every day, I witness the strengths these students bring and the structural obstacles they face.

I want to begin by acknowledging the sincere intentions behind SB 156. Proponents rightly highlight that completing high school, securing full-time work, and forming stable families are associated with greater economic stability for many Americans. Research from American Enterprise Institute, Brookings, and the Institute for Family Studies is often cited to show strong correlations between these milestones and reduced poverty rates. These correlations are real and helping students understand pathways to long-term stability is a worthwhile goal.

However, SB 156 prescribes a single cultural and moralized "life sequence" as a statewide educational requirement. That approach carries educational, constitutional, and developmental risks that deserve serious reconsideration**.**

1. Correlation is not causation and the bill's structure treats it as such.

The bill's text defines the "success sequence" as a three-pronged formula that "individuals…are overwhelmingly less likely to live in poverty" if they follow (Sec. 3301.0717(A)).

But major labor-market analyses from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that:

a. Thousands of full-time workers remain below the poverty line due to wage stagnation and unstable scheduling.

b. Married couples with children experience poverty at higher rates than married couples without children.

c. Poverty rates differ only marginally between married individuals and unmarried individuals once socioeconomic background is controlled.

These findings indicate that the sequence may *describe* who is already set up to succeed, but not the *cause* of success.

2. SB 156 risks stigmatizing students from "out-of-sequence" families.

In my classrooms and community programs, many students come from families that do not match this prescribed order. These students already face stereotypes that their home lives are "lesser," "broken," or "risk factors." A mandatory, state-endorsed curriculum that frames one family structure as the "correct" path can unintentionally:

a. Increase shame among students in single-parent, blended, or same-sex-parent households.

b. Imprint the idea that their parents made "wrong" choices.

c. Signal that their family circumstances predict failure even when they are thriving.

As educators, we know stigma undermines academic engagement, belonging, and mental health. Any statewide curriculum must avoid messaging that marginalizes the children we are entrusted to support.

3. SB 156 frames poverty primarily as a matter of individual moral decision-making.

The bill's curriculum requirements focus on personal sequencing rather than systemic conditions. Yet students routinely name barriers far outside their control:

a. Underfunded schools
b. Lack of access to mental health care
c. Transportation instability
d. Structural racism
e. Wage stagnation and limited youth employment options
f. Lack of affordable housing

No sequence (no matter how well intended) can compensate for inequitable systems.

4. Stronger, research-supported alternatives already exist.

Ohio would better serve its students by adopting evidence-based curricula that:

a. Teach comprehensive financial literacy
b. Provide robust, inclusive health and relationship education
c. Support career and technical training aligned with Ohio's dynamic workforce needs
d. Empower students with life-planning skills without prescribing a specific moral or religious family structure

These approaches focus on skill-building and opportunity expansion, not social conformity.

Conclusions

Ohio's young people deserve tools rooted in evidence, inclusivity, and respect for the full diversity of families that make up our state. We can teach students about multiple pathways to stability *without endorsing* a singular sequence of life choices or inadvertently marginalizing the very children most impacted by poverty. **I respectfully urge this committee to reject SB 156 in favor of pursuing legislation that targets the underlaying systemic barriers to Ohioans economic stability.**

Thank you for your time and for your service to the people of Ohio. I am happy to answer any questions.

Nicholas Denton, PhD