

### Opponent Testimony re: SB 34

Thank you Chairperson Brenner, Co-Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and committee members for taking time to hear my concerns about SB 34.

I am a person of faith and a life-long church attendee who believes strongly in the establishment clause and the need to uphold it. I therefore am strongly opposed to SB 34, the Historical Educational Displays Act.

As you know the proposed legislation mandates school boards choose 1 document for display from a list of 10 so-called historical documents that includes Ten Commandments. In reviewing proponent testimony by Pastor Throckmorton and Christian Business Partnership Director Monty Lobb it seemed clear the Ten Commandments document is their primary focus despite the fact sponsor Johnson appears to be offering school boards a choice. It is apparent that because previous attempts in other states to mandate displays of solely the Ten Commandments in schools were declared unconstitutional, this is an attempt to circumvent this by declaring the Commandments historically significant and encasing them in this list of other selected documents.

Regarding this list I would first ask who's history? It certainly does not reflect the history of Black Americans, or even American women. How is it that the Articles of Confederation are on this list but Emancipation Proclamation is not? And the extremely lengthy and archaic Magna Carta is here but not the 19th Amendment? This is literally whitewashed history that ignores our shortcomings in establishing "liberty and justice for all" and our on-going push to address them. And if district boards choose to display the Ten Commandments which version will they choose? There are noteworthy differences between the versions of the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant faiths. I submit that discussion of these differences is better left to religious educators in churches and universities who have researched and studied them in seminary. This is and should not be under the purview of school board members.

Sponsor Johnson and both proponents discussed our Founding Fathers' reliance on religious wisdom in creating our government, but they ignore the dangers our founders saw in the establishment of a state religion. As Americans United for Separation of Church and State write "Our Constitution was the first not to mention a god or deity. Our Constitution was the first to ban religious tests for public office. In fact, religion is mentioned only twice: in the First Amendment... and in Article VI." Both proponents cherry picked quotes from the Founding Fathers they interpret as justifying this proposed legislation. I urge you to heed the words of Thomas Jefferson who wrote "Religious institutions that use government power in support of themselves and force their views on persons of other faiths, or of no faith, undermine our civil rights.

Moreover, state support of an established religion tends to make the clergy unresponsive to their own people and leads to corruption with religion itself. Erecting

the wall of separation between church and state, therefore, is absolutely essential in a free society." Or perhaps the more succinct words of James Madison resonate when he wrote "Religion flourishes in greater purity without rather than with the aid of government". Jefferson also prophetically recognized that immigrants from other lands with differing religions would come to our country when he spoke of the "Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mohammedan, the Hindu and Infidel of every nation" and when he wrote "Difference of opinion is advantageous in religion...Let us reflect that [the world] is inhabited by a thousand millions of people. That these profess probably a thousand different systems of religion. That ours is but one of that thousand." He was a visionary who eloquently spoke of the need for religious tolerance.

Regarding tolerance I am very aware of a push among our Ohio legislators to chip away at the separation created in the Establishment Clause and to bring a very intolerant version of Christianity in to our public schools. I participated in testimony against HB 445 and SB 1, and have seen videos of some of our legislators meeting with the National Association of Christian Leadership to strategize ways to get RTRI "shall" legislation passed in every state, and to get during school hours RTRI programs established in every school in the country. I am also aware of Mr. Lobb's ties to the Center for Christian Virtue which is involved in this push to establish Christian education during school hours. Their claims that we need to reintroduce these historic principles of virtue are happening simultaneously as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Social and Emotional Learning programs are coming under repeated attacks. Both programs were created to promote a culture of kindness, empathy, and acceptance among students, and DEI was created to promote both equal opportunity and access for students of lesser economic means and those with disabilities. Even the federal government on Friday rolled back some of the austere language against DEI, recognizing that fairness and access in education is critical for all students. Let DEI and SEL do what they were created to do. Take the Ten Commandments and religion out of the equation, and in closing let us again heed the words of Thomas Jefferson: "...it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are 20 Gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." Let the Commandments remain solely in the realm of religious history.

Thank you for your time and attention.