

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Joseph Kaiser. I am a resident of Norwalk, OH, an Ohio taxpayer, and someone deeply invested in upholding constitutional principles within our public schools.

I am strongly opposed to SB 34.

SB 34 would require all Ohio school districts to select four of nine state-approved “founding documents” to display in every social studies and history classroom beginning in fourth grade. The list includes several explicitly religious materials, such as *The Ten Commandments*, the Ohio state motto “With God All Things Are Possible,” and the national motto “In God We Trust.” While the bill frames these materials as “educational,” the effect is unmistakable: it inserts religious doctrine into public school classrooms in ways that raise immediate constitutional concerns.

Public schools serve students of every background—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, atheist, and many who are still discovering their own beliefs. Giving school districts a list that includes religious texts and mottos, and then allowing outside religious organizations to fund or donate the displays, creates an atmosphere of government endorsement of particular religious viewpoints. Courts have repeatedly rejected similar measures in other states because they blur, or outright erase, the separation between church and state.

The requirement that these displays be “reasonably visible” and accompanied by a description of “historical importance” does not solve the problem. Classroom walls are limited space, and requiring teachers to elevate certain documents—especially documents tied to specific faith traditions—inevitably communicates to students that these are the values the state believes they should accept. That is not education; it is coercion.

Additionally, this bill creates significant inequities among school districts. Some communities—often those with strong relationships to particular religious organizations—will be offered free displays or funding. Others will not. The result is a patchwork system in which some districts are pressured to accept religious donations to avoid taking already-strained dollars out of their education budgets. This is an inappropriate and unethical dynamic, and one that no child, parent, or teacher should be forced into.

Ohio educators already have the ability to teach about the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Federalist Papers, the Northwest Ordinance, and countless other foundational documents. They do not need state-mandated wall décor to teach history. They need resources, support, and freedom from politically motivated mandates that burden classrooms rather than enrich them.

Finally, I urge the committee to consider the inevitable legal consequences. Similar laws in other states have been struck down as violations of the First Amendment because they promote

religious doctrine in public schools. Passing SB 34 invites costly litigation that Ohio taxpayers—not bill sponsors—will be forced to pay for.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this unconstitutional, inappropriate, and deeply unnecessary bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.