

Monday, November 17, 2025

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Tracy Reiss. I am a resident of Akron, Ohio, a citizen of this great democracy, and I am here as a defender of the Constitution that generations of Americans have fought and died to protect.

I am passionately and unequivocally opposed to Senate Bill 34.

Let me be absolutely clear: this bill is not about history or education. This bill imposes religious doctrine on Ohio's children through government power. It is a direct assault on the First Amendment, a betrayal of our founding principles, and an insult to every Ohioan who values religious freedom.

In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled in *Stone v. Graham* that requiring Ten Commandments displays in public school classrooms is unconstitutional—period. Such displays have no secular purpose and violate the Establishment Clause. That precedent still stands. Yet here we are, watching this committee consider legislation that flagrantly defies settled constitutional law. Senate Bill 34 is a cynical attempt to circumvent *Stone v. Graham* by dressing religious indoctrination as historical education. When religious organizations stand ready to donate these displays free of charge, we all know exactly what this bill accomplishes.

I am angry because this bill fundamentally misunderstands what makes America exceptional. Our founders did not flee religious persecution and craft a Constitution only to have government mandate which religious texts our children must face daily in classrooms. The First Amendment protects religious freedom by keeping government out of promoting religion. When you put the Ten Commandments on classroom walls, you privilege one tradition over all others.

Think about the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, atheist, and agnostic students who will walk into their public school classrooms and be confronted, day after day, with a religious text that is not theirs. These students will understand exactly what this legislature is telling them: You are not fully welcome here. Your beliefs are not equal. That is not American. That is the opposite of everything we claim to stand for.

Let's address the dishonest framing. Supporters claim the Ten Commandments are simply historical, foundational to Western law. The Supreme Court rejected this exact argument in 1980. The first four commandments are explicitly religious—they command worship of a specific God, prohibit idolatry, and mandate Sabbath observance. These are theological doctrines, not legal principles. Displaying them in classrooms is not education—it is evangelism with a government stamp.

This bill includes Ohio's state motto—'With God All Things Are Possible'—and 'In God We Trust' among required displays. This is not subtle. This is a coordinated effort to saturate public schools with monotheistic religious messaging. Furthermore, by allowing religious organizations to donate displays, SB 34 lets them purchase influence in our public schools.

The hypocrisy is staggering. Legislators who decry government overreach now mandate what must appear on classroom walls. Voices that invoke 'parental rights' force other people's children to encounter religious doctrine contradicting their family's beliefs. Politicians who claim to defend the Constitution are trampling the First Amendment. This bill will be challenged in court. It will lose. Ohio taxpayers will foot the bill for futile litigation defending the indefensible, wasting resources that should go to education.

Remember what you are here to do. You are not here to impose your personal religious beliefs on Ohio's children. You are here to serve all Ohioans—of every faith and no faith. You are here to uphold the Constitution, not to subvert it. Our founders gave us the First Amendment because they understood the dangers of government-sponsored religion. They knew that faith must be free to be authentic, and that religion thrives when government stays out of it.

Senate Bill 34 violates those principles. It betrays the Constitution. It disrespects religious diversity. It harms children. And it diminishes Ohio.

I ask you—I implore you—to vote NO on this unconstitutional, un-American, and shameful bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracy Reiss". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Tracy Reiss