

Chairman Roegner, Vice chairman Beker, and ranking member Leland, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak today.

My name is Nikki Buskirk. I'm a wife of almost 10 years and the mommy of three boys. These are my boys. Sawyer who is 7, Oliver who is 4, and my six-month-old Silas who is sitting back there. I came to speak to you today against House Bill 228.

I live in a great neighborhood. When you think of growing up and settling down, this is the neighborhood you think of. Great schools, neighbors who bake cookies for each other during the holidays, and kids playing tag in the front yard. But even in this neighborhood there is still racism.

While playing at a park a little girl told my four-year-old her mommy said she couldn't marry my son because of his brown skin. There's often a very intimidating truck that drives around revving his engine with a confederate flag flying in the back. When we first moved on the street, while we were still unpacking, the lady from up the street sent her church group down to check us out. Not because she wanted us to join her church, but to see what our family was like, because there's never been a black family on the street. And most recently a white nationalist group decided to put stickers up that said once you go black we don't want you back.

Our neighborhood police officers are very nice. They do trunk or treat, they patrol our neighborhood, and they always smile and wave at my boys. But even Ohio police officers have made questionable calls. From killing a Cleveland boy who was in the park playing with a toy gun. To killing a Dayton man in Walmart who was carrying a product in the store that the store was selling. If trained professionals are having problems making these life or death decisions, how can we trust regular citizens to be able to make the same decisions?

My boys are like any other boys their age. They play baseball and soccer, they ride their bikes, they go to trick-or-treating, and they go to church. What happens when the little girl whose mom doesn't want her to marry my son because of his brown skin sees them playing together and perceives my little boy as a threat? What if instead of sending her church group down, the neighbor up the street sent an armed group down because she perceived my family as a threat?

It's already bad enough that I have to sit outside and watch my boys play because I'm worried about stranger danger, which I do teach my boys about, but I can't stop a bullet because someone thought my boys were threats.

Right now they look like cute little boys, but both my husband and I are tall, and these same boys are going to be tall boys. America has already decided tall boys wearing hoodies should be perceived to be threats.

But remember one thing. Our country was founded on slavery and racism. I'm a black woman whose grandma spoke about these hardships. I'm also a black woman who has lived through the same hardships. A white guy dressed in camo with a confederate flag can be perceived as a threat to me.

Thank you for allowing me to speak and please do not pass house bill 228.