

Dear Committee Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Becker, Ranking Member Leland, and distinguished members of the Federalism and Interstate Relations Committee,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today regarding my thoughts on HB 228. I represent Progress NW Ohio, a progressive citizen advocacy group. Our members recently participated in March for Our Lives events in Sandusky, Cleveland, and our nation's capital; and as a result, we have a renewed focus on advocating for measures that would prevent gun violence not only in our schools, but also in our own communities, and communities all over Ohio. When we heard students and community leaders speak at these marches, not one of them spoke for the need for more permissive legislation such as HB 228; in fact, the unifying thread of all the marches was the need for stricter, more comprehensive controls on gun-related legislation.

Unfortunately, HB 228, which contains the legislative provision commonly referred to as Stand Your Ground, would do much to increase gun violence in Ohio, not reduce it. It would thoughtlessly overturn years of self-defense doctrine, and promote dangerous vigilantism, even in situations where there is a safe, public option for retreat. Studies have repeatedly shown that this legislation makes communities more dangerous, not less. A Texas A&M study demonstrated that in 21 states, SYG laws were associated with a stunning increase in homicides. In 2013, *The Tampa Bay Times* found that children and young people have been victims of these laws: 26 children and teens have been murdered in Florida since the inception of the SYG law there in 2005. Furthermore, a 2016 Journal of American Medical Association study found that the law was associated with a 24.4% increase in homicide and a 31.6% increase in firearm-related homicide in Florida, when compared with states that did not have this type of law. Ironically, one of the states used as a control in that study was Ohio.

In addition, these Stand Your Ground laws would have a devastating effect on communities of color and perpetuate racial injustice. Studies have shown that when white shooters kill black victims under SYG, those homicides are considered justified 11 times more frequently than when the reverse is true. Also, in Florida, when the victim of a SYG case is a minority, the murderer is half as likely to be convicted.

Not only does HB 228 incorporate SYG language, it would remove the mandatory requirement that public places such as day cares and airports clearly post that weapons are prohibited on their grounds. Furthermore, it would reduce penalties for concealed carry handgun violations, in these very same venues. Reducing the penalties for these type of violations and not clearly posting the weapons prohibition would engender confusion and allow more guns in our public spaces; these changes definitely would not promote responsible gun ownership.

Furthermore, this bill incorporates a problematic provision that would effectively prohibit passage of additional gun laws deemed necessary by local cities and communities. Cities and communities need to decide which laws are best for them; the state should not preempt their democratic process. Some state laws may not be sufficient enough for certain communities, and these communities should be able to determine and pass the laws they need to ensure their safety and well-being.

Laws such as HB 228 have been crafted at the insistence of special interests looking to further their own agendas and profit margins; they are NOT what Ohioans asked for. I would urge legislators to instead listen to the students and community members who marched for their lives last month and who asked for more evidence-based restrictions, not legislation that would promote lawlessness and more violence. As a result, I strongly oppose this legislation, and I am respectfully asking this Committee to oppose HB 228.

Sincerely,

Sonal Vyas-Weit