

## **Testimony on House Bill 381**

House Criminal Justice Committee Rep. George F. Lang, Chair; Rep. Phil Plummer, Vice Chair;  
Rep. David Leland, Ranking Member  
Submitted by: Jared Gardner

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Minority Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to give my citizen testimony against House Bill 381.

I come before you today as a gun owner and a native of our capital city. I have never loved my city so much as I do this week, as thousands of people peacefully protest to expose and reform the racist violence that has woven itself into our criminal justice system. It is truly shocking to me—at this moment in the history of our city, our state, and our nation—that our state legislators are pushing forward a shoot-first bill. The data clearly demonstrates that these bills do *not* work as advertised. As the American Bar Association’s report makes clear, “Stand Your Ground laws increase homicides, have no deterrent on serious crimes, result in racial disparities in the criminal justice system and impede law enforcement.” Numerous other studies, including a major study by the RAND Corporation, arrive at the same answer: these laws increase homicides and increase the likelihood that a white person will fatally shoot a person of color.

At a time when millions across the country are standing outside statehouses such as our own, demanding, at long last, fundamental changes to the historical racial inequities in our justice system—from the ways in which we police our communities to the mass incarceration of people of color—it is the fundamental racism of these laws that demands attention. All evidence shows unequivocally that these bills serve to embolden and protect white assailants who choose to take law in their own hands against people of color. From Trayvon Martin, whose murderer in Florida was shielded by the first legislation of this kind, to Ahmaud Arbery, whose murderers were initially not charged by prosecutors in Georgia because of stand your ground laws, these laws have over and over again been used to justify and shield modern-day lynchings across this country.

We have enough problems with a racist justice system in this state, as the protestors outside your doors attest. Now you want to give a green light to vigilante justice that will most often target people of color? The data demonstrates that it is all but impossible for black defendants to successfully assert stand-your-ground defense if the victim is white; whites, as we have seen all too often, are given the benefit of these laws’ protections, especially if the victim is black. These laws embolden armed citizens to escalate public altercations, and people of color are paying the price. We do not need, nor do we want, this here in Ohio. Not now, not ever.

This bill is on the wrong side of history, and it should never have been proposed, knowing all we know about the impact of such laws in other states. The fact that you are moving forward with this legislation at this moment in history demonstrates an appalling unwillingness to listen to the voices of those who will be disproportionately impacted by these laws. Those voices are close at hand. Before you make a fatal mistake, please go ask them what they think about this law and how it will impact their communities. Black lives, black voices matter.

In a perfect world in which racism did not shape every national and state institution from the courthouse to the statehouse, a “stand your ground” law might be theoretically tenable, I suppose. But this is as far from that ideal as it has ever been. As a result, what you are proposing here is nothing but a lynching license. I am ashamed for my state that we are even having this conversation today.