

Chairman George Lang, Vice Chair Phil Plummer, Ranking Member Dave Leland, and members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Jennifer Powers. I am a resident of the city of Columbus and have worked at libraries in both Columbus and Westerville for the past 14 years. I am strongly opposed to HB 381.

This bill, commonly referred to as “Stand Your Ground”--or, more tellingly--“Kill at Will,” is, in a word, inhumane. It is very important to note that Ohioans already have a right to practice self defense when they find themselves in imminent danger. I fear that HB 381 will embolden some to think themselves immune from prosecution in scenarios where using deadly force is, in fact, unjustified. I am particularly disturbed by the term “lawfully present,” meaning that citizens could invoke this legislation to justify using deadly force not only outside their homes, but outside their vehicles, or in parks, or any number of other public spaces where weapons are permitted, even if the use of deadly force could have been avoided.

Having worked in 2 public libraries and 1 college library for the past 14 years, I have borne personal witness to (and been a part of) many moments of tension and potential danger—between patron and patron, patron and staff member, patron and law enforcement official—and I am grateful that every last one of these scenarios has been resolved by non-violent tactics. I firmly believe in the power of mediation and de-escalation techniques, and I strongly urge you to consider their merits and how they are viable, morally just, and more effective alternatives to SYG legislation.

Briefly: In section 1B1 (pp. 5-6) of the document “Examining the Race Effects of Stand Your Ground Laws and Related Issues,” published by the United States Commission of Civil Rights in April of this year, two studies are referenced—one conducted from 2000-2010, and one compiled in 2013 and published in 2017—that both concluded that homicide rates go significantly up in Stand Your Ground states (by as much as a staggering 6.8-8%). The section concludes with the statement: “Under both the increased deterrence and decrease in homicide policy rationales, Stand Your Ground in practice appears to fail miserably on the national level.”

I apologize for not being able to come to speak with you in person today. Nonetheless, I ask you to consider, for the sake of your fellow Ohioan citizens, my testimony, and vote NO on this dangerous and harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

-Jennifer Powers