

Testimony on House Bill 381
House Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:
Kelsie Fields

Chair Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony in opposition to HB 381. I am writing to you as a private citizen and Columbus resident because I am concerned that this bill will lead to unnecessary deaths that could be prevented, especially for Black people.

As a woman, I am very aware of the need for laws protecting self-defense. Additionally, while I am not a gun owner myself, I grew up in a family that valued and respected guns. From an early age, my father instilled in me the importance of gun safety, and though our house was filled with guns of all types, I never felt unsafe because of the responsibility that my father displayed in being a gun owner. This bill disregards the responsibility that comes with being a gun owner by allowing guns to be used even when there is another clear option for safety, and it is extremely dangerous. It provides people with a more violent way of resolving “disputes” even and especially when this way is unnecessary. I can think of many times that I accidentally cut someone off in traffic, and daily situations like these could turn deadly if this law as passed. The likelihood of situations like these resulting in someone dying is significantly higher for Black people due to the systemic violence and racism that permeates our society. When white shooters kill Black victims, the resulting homicides are deemed justifiable 11 times more frequently than when the shooter is Black and the victim is white ¹. Bills like this give people an excuse to murder if they feel threatened, whether that threat is true or just a perception or misunderstanding. Bills like this shield murderers like those who killed Ahmaud Arbery, and it must not be passed.

Not only does this bill endanger Black people, it endangers public safety as a whole. When Florida implemented Stand Your Ground law, the state saw a 32% increase in firearm homicide rates ². A follow-up study showed that the state saw a **75% increase** in justifiable homicide rates ³. Furthermore, in 79% of Florida Stand Your Ground cases, the person who claimed Stand Your Ground could have retreated to avoid the confrontation ⁴. That means that 79% of those killed could still be alive today. This is important to note because in 68% of those cases, the person killed was unarmed ⁵.

I think that we can all agree on the value of human life. If that is the case, then this bill cannot be passed. Traditional self-defense law gives people the right to protect themselves but always on the foundational belief that it is best to avoid killing someone if possible. HB 381 disregards that premise entirely and is extremely dangerous for our society.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Kelsie Fields

NOTES

1: Roman J. Race, justifiable homicide, and Stand Your Ground Laws: Analysis of FBI Supplementary Homicide Report data. *Urban Institute*. 2013.

2: Humphreys DK, Gasparini A, Wiebe DJ. Evaluating the impact of Florida’s “Stand Your Ground” Self-defense law on homicide and suicide by firearm: An interrupted time series study. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2017; 177(1): 44-50.

3: Humphreys DK, Gasparini A, Wiebe DJ. Association between enactment of a “Stand Your Ground” self-defense law and unlawful homicides in Florida: An interrupted time series study. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2017; 177(10): 1523-1524.

4: Spitzer RJ. Stand your ground makes no sense. *New York Times*. May 4, 2015. <https://nyti.ms/2CcMW4y>.

5: Id.