

Opponent Testimony on House Bill 381

Criminal Justice Committee Rep. George F. Lang, Chair
Rep. Phil Plummer, Vice Chair
Rep. David Leland, Ranking Member

Submitted by: Lauren Squires

Chair Lang and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony in opposition to House Bill 381. My name is Lauren Squires, and I am a concerned citizen, asking you to reject this bill. I live in Columbus in the University District, and I am a professor at The Ohio State University and a volunteer commissioner on my neighborhood Area Commission. I'm also a mother of a 5-year-old and a 10-month-old.

I am asking you to put the public safety of your constituents first and reject this deadly bill. Stand Your Ground laws are associated with increases in homicides and injuries across different demographics and neighborhoods, but they disproportionately impact communities of color. For example, Florida Stand Your Ground cases with minority victims are half as likely to lead to conviction, compared to cases with white victims. Laws like this allow for events like the killing of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, and for delays in justice for the victims, or the absence of justice entirely. To allow a bill like this to become law in Ohio would be to double down on the idea that black lives are expendable, in a moment when Ohioans are screaming out for us to enact policies that contribute to the safety of black communities, not their continued targeting.

Even aside from the issue of racial bias in the application of Stand Your Ground, guns are inherently deadly weapons, and we should never lose sight of this. We should not create the conditions for more people to believe they can use their guns with impunity. Stand Your Ground laws allow people to shoot to kill in public, even when they can safely walk away from the danger. Data show that rather than being necessary forms of self-defense, Stand Your Ground laws simply encourage deadly violence. In 79 percent of Florida Stand Your Ground cases, the person who claimed Stand Your Ground could have retreated to avoid the confrontation. If we value human life at all, I simply cannot understand the logic of this bill.

Around the same time last year, I gave testimony against permitless carry legislation (HB 178) to the House Federalism Committee. In that hearing, ranking committee member Rep. Adam Miller asked me some questions related to my position as a professor at Ohio State. One thing he asked is whether our state's gun-related laws might have some effect on OSU's ability to attract and retain the very best faculty, staff, and students. While I can't speak for others, I do know that the culture, climate, and policies of a state are certainly among the factors people weigh when determining where to locate for work or for school. And I can say that for many of my colleagues, a state that seems to value people's right to commit deadly violence over the lives of those who might be the victims is not an attractive state to move to.

As we consider how to get people to come to Ohio and to stay here, I do believe we should recognize that laws like this will keep some people away, and at the same time, are unlikely to

attract anyone. I don't think this is the primary reason this bill should be rejected; the primary reason is to save lives. But I present it in case it may be the issue that moves you.

Thank you for your time.

Lauren Squires
Columbus