

Hello and thank you for your time. My name is Muna Ali. I am a rising senior at Westerville North High School and currently volunteer with Students Demand Action Ohio. I am writing to share my opposition to HB 381, a Stand Your Ground bill that would endanger the safety of Ohioans across the state.

As a high school student of color, I've grown up in an era where firearm related violence has become sensationalized by the media. I've watched as both local and national news outlets discussed shootings in graphic detail; I've watched news anchors describe the seemingly endless number of people killed, as well as the traumas endured by the survivors. I watched as the city of Dayton experienced twenty-six locals get shot - nine of whom lost their lives - within the span of thirty-two seconds. I'm going to be blunt here: I don't want to see any more of these shootings happen in my state. I shouldn't live in fear that I'll be the next victim plastered on the news to be mourned. I don't want another Dayton to happen in my lifetime, and I'm sure this legislative body feels the same way. However, HB 381 is not the solution to this problem. If anything, it will only further encourage senseless armed violence in Ohio. The statistics are clear: states where Stand Your Ground laws have been enacted have reported increases in gun-related injuries and deaths; there is a direct association between states that have enacted Stand Your Ground laws and increases in the number of firearm injuries reported in emergency rooms. Enacting HB 381 will have a negative impact on Ohioans, and would be an irresponsible reaction to the Dayton shooting.

It's also important to discuss who will be impacted by HB 381 if it were to be enacted. Gun violence as a result of Stand Your Ground laws have had a disproportionate impact on people of color, which has been further exacerbated by centuries of systemic inequality and racism. I'm sure you all are cognizant of the protests currently going on as a consequence of police brutality in black communities. It's clear that gun violence of all kinds - from the use of deadly force to hate crimes - have devastating, lasting impacts on black and brown communities. As a teenager of color, I know that an unfortunate number of my peers have lost loved ones to gun violence. By enacting HB 381, racial inequity will be further emphasized in neighborhoods across the state through loss of life. It's important to note that in Florida, a state whose Stand Your Ground law has gained notoriety, cases involving victims of color are half as likely to lead to convictions compared to cases involving white victims. I urge you to consider the detrimental effects that this bill would have on Ohio's most vulnerable communities.

In the face of the global pandemic that has left over a hundred thousand Americans dead, gun violence has not disappeared. To say so would be dismissive towards those who have lost their lives, as well as their families. It is more important than ever to focus our collective energy towards preventing further loss of life. Instead of promoting dangerous bills such as HB 381 that will further promote violence in our communities, especially those of color, I implore this legislative body to instead explore common-sense solutions that are both fair and equitable for all Ohioans.

Best,  
Muna Ali