



Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition Addresses Stand Your Ground HB381

The Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition has been on the frontlines working to address the impact of racism on health disparities. Health disparities are a direct result of slavery, racism and centuries of maltreatment. Stand Your Ground is one such policy that is deemed as racist. In states where “stand your ground” is the law of the land, white-on-black homicides are 354 percent more likely to be ruled justified than in incidents of white-on-white homicides according to the nonprofit Urban Institute. The Center for American Progress also reported recently that in states like Florida for example, that implemented “stand your ground” in 2005, gun violence in the state experienced a 20 percent increase—a near two decades high. As an interesting point of comparison, the state’s non-gun related murder rate declined by 45 percent during this same period.

Simply put, Stand Your Ground impacts black lives more. In essence, “stand your ground” laws provide an escape clause from criminal prosecution for individuals who kill another person. Across the country “stand your ground” laws have provided a convenient self-defense option for perpetrators of white on black homicides—the most famous in recent years, the Trayvon Martin case. Martin was a 17-year-old shot and killed by George Zimmerman in Florida in 2012. Using a “stand your ground” defense, Zimmerman was found not guilty of Martin’s murder.

The Ohio Legislature must recognize and document the racialized social factors that contribute to the quiet, systematic, and deleterious processes that continue to disproportionately affect minority populations under Stand Your Ground. We cannot look at racism as a public health crisis and not consider the Stand Your Ground legislation as anything but racist. Racism has allowed us to turn a blind eye to this public health emergency that has robbed African Americans of their lives.

The Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition (NEOBHC) examines how political and social policies contribute to disparities in the African-American community. We write against House Bill 381 legislation that descended from 17th century English common law. The so-called Castle Doctrine decreed that a man (women and children were considered property then) had the right to protect himself if an intruder breached the privacy of his home. That doctrine would later be applied in the English colonies across the sea, even before there was a United States. It wasn't for everyone. Author Caroline Light says, the right to kill a dangerous intruder or enemy was reserved for white, property-owning males. Settlers could kill native people who objected to the appropriation of their lands, but they'd face little, if any, retribution. The reverse wasn't true for native peoples. "Native Americans who wanted to defend their homes from colonization had no legal grounds to stand on," Light notes. Nor did slaves or freedmen. During and well after the civil war, stand your ground was used to protect white men's homes and possessions — including wives and daughters — from the mostly imaginary threat of non-white predators.



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The Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition understands that African Americans will suffer the ill effects of unjust policies and practices from a wider community that has failed to recognize inequities and take action on the real impact of those inequities “racism”.