

Sandra Macpherson
Testimony on HB 381
OH House Criminal Justice Committee

Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, members of the committee—thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 381. I speak to you today as a parent and a survivor, a citizen deeply concerned with the effects such a law is likely to have on public and private safety.

I have never told this story, and it might shock the people here who know me and my family. When I was a teenager my father—a rather placid man these days, now that his mental illness is properly medicated—chased my mother, brother, and myself out into a snowstorm at the end of shotgun. He lined us up, and he aimed the gun at my mother. It was, as it turned out, not loaded. To this day I don't know if he knew that or not. He tried to strangle my mother during another violent episode a decade later, so I believe—it's too painful for him to be asked to remember these things—that he intended to kill her, and us.

I love my father, and he loves all of us desperately, completely. I have come to understand him better in the last decade because I am raising a child who is very much like him, who struggles with depression and an explosive anger that tends toward physical violence. She is loving, hilarious, smart and very, very kind. But I worry that if there were a gun in our house, we—and in particular, I, her mother—would not be safe.

We know that American women are 21 times more likely to be shot and killed than women in other countries, and that half of the victims of intimate partner homicide in the U.S. are killed with a gun. We know that in 54 percent of mass shootings, the perpetrator began by shooting an intimate partner or family member. A recent study of Florida's "Stand Your Ground" found a 32 percent increase in firearm homicides of adults, and a 45 percent increase among adolescents since the law took effect. Reflecting on this data, one criminologist at the University of Texas at Dallas has suggested "it is possible individuals are becoming more likely to use lethal force if they perceive their lives to be in danger because they believe that the law will protect them."¹

The question, of course, is what it means for someone to believe they are in danger. My beloved child tends to imagine that we, and not she, are aggressors. My beloved father reacts violently whenever he feels trapped, attacked, and unfree. "Stand Your Ground" laws encourage persons to shoot even when they can clearly and safely walk away from perceived danger. They encourage the escalation of violence, both at the hands of those who feel threatened, and those coming to others' defense. There is no data showing such laws deter crime, and plenty of data indicating an increase in homicide and in firearms injuries resulting in

¹ Lisa Rapaport, "Gun homicides of teens rise after 'Stand Your Ground' self-defense law," *Reuters Health News*, January 2, 2020.

emergency room visits and hospitalizations.² The negative sociological and economic impacts of these numbers is indisputable, and the burden on the health care sector—that sector we have, under the present emergency, come to understand as essential, and fragile—particularly alarming.

Allowing Ohio to become a “Stand Your Ground” state threatens to put children, families, and communities at risk. I urge you *not* to allow this, *not* to enable more and more people—good people, well-meaning people, mentally ill people, paranoid people, aggressive people—to arm themselves against their fellow man. Please vote against HB 381: for me, for my family, for your families, for your citizens. It is your obligation to keep us safe.

² McClellann CB, Tekin E. Stand your ground laws, homicides, and injuries. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. 2012; Cheng C, Hoekstra M. Does strengthening self-defense law deter crime or escalate violence? Evidence from castle doctrine. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. 2012. See also: Gius M. The relationship between stand-your-ground laws and crime: A state-level analysis. *The Social Science Journal*. 2016; 53(3): 329-338.