

Testimony on HB381
House Criminal Justice Committee
Rep. George F. Lang, Chair
Vice Chair Phil Plummer

Submitted by Tina Larsen

Chair Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, and other members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, I appreciate this opportunity today to voice my strong opposition to HB381, most commonly known as *Stand Your Ground*, but also described as *Kill at Will or Shoot First*.

My name is Tina Larsen, and I am testifying as a private citizen from Plain City, Ohio. I'm disappointed so little advance notice was provided for this hearing, which prevented the voices of many, many more of your constituents from being heard. It's also a shame our neighbors who couldn't join because of health concerns related to COVID19, were not permitted to have their testimony read by others.

Today, as the Floyd family buries their son, and massive demonstrations play out on our streets, it is worth nothing that the Black Lives Matter movement was born from the needless killing of 17 year-old Trayvon Martin, murdered by a man - emboldened by a *Stand Your Ground* law - simply because he was frightened by a black teenager in a hoodie. That was 2012. Here we are, eight year and countless more murders later, and I can't believe the state I was born and raised in, the state I love, is considering passing a law which is guaranteed to cause more deaths.

Like Trayvon's grieving mother, I have a teenager who often wears a hoodie. That wasn't Trayvon's crime, though. His crime was being black, in the presence of a racist in a *Stand Your Ground* state. His murderer called the police and he was told not to pursue Trayvon. Officers were dispatched. But he didn't back down. Instead, he pursued his prey, initiated a confrontation, and murdered an unarmed black kid on his way home from a candy run. A prosecutor in the case said, "The state would have had an easier time pressing their case under Florida's pre-*Stand Your Ground* (law)... which required the defendant to show he used every reasonable means within his power and consistent with his own safety to avoid the danger before resorting to that force." (1)

Reasonable means to avoid danger.

That's all we're asking. No one expects someone being attacked to surrender helplessly. Just be reasonable. Try to avoid killing someone. HB381 says the opposite. It allows untrained, armed civilians, to make life and death decisions based on nothing more than fear and prejudice.

In Florida, where Trayvon Martin was killed, 60 percent of shooters who claimed *Stand Your Ground* as their defense had been arrested at least once before the day they killed someone. A third of them had been previously charged with violent crimes. (2)

Why would we model an Ohio law on one with such sad statistics?

Why, when currently, there is only a duty to retreat when there is a “clear and safe alternative,” would we encourage armed civilians to not exercise common sense.

Why, in a body where “the sanctity of human life” is so important when discussing reproductive choices, is it completely ignored in gun legislation?

HB 381 is too extreme and too dangerous for Ohio and is not the action my neighbors in Plain City and fellow Ohioans are urging you to take. Thank you for your time and consideration. I will take any questions you may have.

1 - <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/state/florida/trayvon-martin/article1953286.html>

2 - <https://www.tampabay.com/news/courts/criminal/many-killers-who-go-free-with-florida-stand-your-ground-law-have-history/1241378/>