

Testimony on House Bill 381
House Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:
Valerie Cumming

Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 381. My name is Valerie Cumming, and I am writing to you today as Vice Mayor and a City Councilmember of Westerville, Ohio. As elected representatives, our job, above all else, is to keep the people we represent safe. I'm writing to you today because I believe that the passage of HB 381 would do just the opposite, by causing increased bodily harm to residents and by promoting racial divisions across Ohio and among the citizens you and I represent.

Over the past week in Westerville, we have seen hundreds of people turn out for marches and demonstrations demanding racial justice. Yet here at the Statehouse, just a short drive away, a bill is under consideration that would further threaten the safety of black bodies, by allowing minor disputes between citizens to potentially erupt into deadly crises. The passage of HB 381 would ensure that white people could feel free to use these so-called "stand your ground" laws as justification to enact their own brand of justice against people of color. In fact, a 2017 study published in *Social Science and Medicine* looked at more than 200 cases involving Florida's "stand your ground" law and found that white defendants were twice as likely to avoid conviction as black defendants.

Moreover, as you are well aware, Ohio already has self-defense laws in place. HB 381 would expand the concept of what constitutes "self defense" to such an extent that it would actually endanger Ohio residents. A 2013 study from Mayors Against Illegal Guns, the National Urban League, and VoteVets.org found that nationwide, states with similar "stand your ground" laws experienced a 53% average increase in the justifiable homicide rate after the law was passed, while states that did not enact the law saw a decline of 5% during the same period.

This is not, and should not, be a partisan issue. As responsible representatives and public servants, we must not even consider legislation that could potentially cause a 53% increase in "justifiable" homicide. We need to trust our police departments and our courts of law to carry out justice, not private citizens acting in the heat of the moment. Please keep the safety of all the Ohioans you represent in mind, and vote no on HB 381.