

Dear Mr. Reed,

I respectfully submit the following as testimony on Senate Bill 33.

I am both an ordained minister and a historian, having received a PhD in American Studies from the University of Minnesota. My area of specialization was the study of minority viewpoints in the United States. I have studied in detail hundreds of first-person accounts of people who were being unjustly treated throughout the course of American history. I have been moved to again and again by the trials some groups have had to face and the obstacles they had to overcome simply to survive. Some of these people were speaking out against institutionalized oppression in the form of slavery or the denial of the right to vote. In other cases, they have spoken out against environmental devastation, caused by human actions, that poisoned the earth under their homes, the water they had to drink, and the air they breathed.

These accounts of environmental injustice, of course, are not simply artifacts of the past. We are all aware of the situation in Flint, Michigan, where residents have been denied access to clean water for years, in a still-ongoing travesty. We are also aware of operations such as mountaintop removal coal mining, which currently causes more than 1,200 deaths a year in our neighboring region of Appalachia (<https://e360.yale.edu/features/a-troubling-look-at-the-human-toll-of-mountaintop-removal-mining>), and spillage associated with oil drilling, which poisons water and destroys livelihoods for citizens living along impacted coastlines.

It is very clear that energy and utility companies place more value on the dollar than on human life and health, and such companies have frequently been known to suppress evidence about the dangers associated with their products and methods

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/23/climate/exxon-global-warming-science-study.html>).

However, throughout history, there has been one source of hope for those who are directly experiencing the health impacts of dangerous environmental practices, and that is the Constitutionally protected right to speak out on one's own behalf, against the forces that are recklessly causing harm. Courageous, selfless citizens have been able to nonviolently place their own bodies between the earth and those that would poison it. People have been able to assemble and raise their voices until they finally drew the attention of the press and the public to unsafe policies and acts of devastation. In this way, a little at a time, and specifically because of those who have spoken out against corporate wrongdoing, we have been able to develop a body of laws designed to protect the people from abuses of power by energy and utility companies that consistently put their own profits above any concern for public safety.

Senate Bill 33 jeopardizes the Constitutional right of the people to speak out against companies that are causing them direct harm, by enacting excessively harsh punishments against those who are peacefully demonstrating. Private property is protected by numerous existing laws, and no further legislation is needed to establish protections for private property. This bill is in its essence a blatant attempt at infringement of the right to free speech, and would do substantial damage to the legal capacity of individuals to protect themselves from harm. I therefore urge you will all due urgency to vote against this bill.

Sincerely,
Rev. Dr. Angela Galik
Ohio District 71