Testimony in Opposition to HB 228 submitted December 3, 2018

The Rev. Canon Dr. Lee Anne Reat, Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio

I come before you today as a person of faith and as the mother of an African-Brazilian son in opposition to HB 228, Ohio’s version of Stand Your Ground legislation

The bill eliminates the duty to retreat as the first line of defense. That means that if a person is legally carrying a gun in a public place and feels threatened by another person, he/she can fire that weapon in response to any perceived threat. This is where the bill gets personal for me. The sad reality is that my son, simply because of the color of his skin, is threatening to some people. We have had to teach him since he was a child to think very carefully and act very deliberately when he leaves the safety of our home. He must be forever cognizant of how he moves, how he speaks, and where he goes in ways that most of us have never even thought about. The protections afforded gun carrying citizens already create an environment in which he feels less safe than ever. If this bill is passed, the victim of a shooting will have the added weight of proving that he/she was not a threat, presuming that person lives to defend him/herself.

Research demonstrates that Stand Your Ground laws actually endanger lives and public safety. A 2016 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that between 2006 and 2016, after the Stand Your Ground law was enacted in Florida, there was a 24.4% increase in homicides overall and a 32% increase in firearm-related homicides specifically, compared to the period between 1999 and 2005, prior to enactment of the law.

Everyone has a right to self-defense, but with self-defense comes the “duty to retreat” before using lethal force. The Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police opposes this legislation, stating “Remove the duty to retreat, you remove a legal constraint that will allow pride, passion, and ego to prevail over common sense.” The American Bar Association 2014 National Task Force supports this, finding that the application of Stand Your Ground laws is “unpredictable, uneven, and results in racial disparities.”

From the perspective of the faith community, HB 228 ignores our Christian call to peace and reconciliation. Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek and to love our enemies. He even rejected the use of force in his own defense as he was being arrested. We must follow his example. As lawmakers, you have the opportunity and sacred responsibility to protect and defend ALL citizens of this state. It is an awesome responsibility and one that demands that you consider the moral and social implications of the laws you pass. We urge you to vote against moving this legislation forward.