December 4, 2018

Senator Coley

Chairperson, Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

1 Capitol Square

Columbus, OH 43215

**Re: Opposition to HB 228, the “Stand Your Ground” bill**

Dear Chairman Coley and Members of the Committee,

My name is Matthew Youkilis, and I am a senior at Walnut Hills High School in Cincinnati. Thank you for listening to my testimony and for your open-mindedness on this issue.

This past Saturday, I attended a high school Academic Quiz Team conference at Northmont High School in Dayton. At this conference, I was enjoying competing in trivia matches with my team about various topics, from literature to the arts to modern history, when during one of our morning matches, one question caused my mind to go completely blank. As soon as I heard the words “Marjory Stoneman Douglas” in one of the questions, which would go on to ask what state the Parkland shooting occurred in, I couldn’t help but think: my cousin is part of a trivia question.

Jaime Guttenberg, my forever-14-year-old first cousin, was killed as she ran away from a gun in a place where she was meant to be safe. That is the reality I have to confront every time I turn on the news and see something about gun violence or walk through the metal detectors at my school every morning or hear my friends talk about Nerf wars or, apparently, participate in a trivia competition. And that is the reality so many people—fellow Americans and fellow Ohioans, who themselves or their ancestors came here for a better, safer life—have to live with.

So I ask, why, when it is not even popularly supported by Ohioans, do we want to subject more families to this grief? Why do we want to put more individuals in harm’s way every day and force people to fear simply going out in public even more because of who may have a gun? And if it really is people and not guns who kill people, then why are we making it easier for untrained individuals and criminals to access and carry concealed firearms?

Look at the statistics, and it is clear that if this bill becomes law, there will only be more deaths. Ohio lawmakers, you have a unique power that very few in this state and in this country have. Please, use it, and use it for good. Use it to save the lives of individuals you may never meet, but who are there. On December 21st, I will turn 18, and I and many others will watch what you do with that power. Please, save people’s lives.

If there is a “clear and safe alternative,” then we should take it. And the clear and safe alternative right now, the alternative that will ensure that nobody in this room ever becomes a trivia question for being murdered, is to vote no on this bill. I am pleading with Ohio lawmakers to vote no on House Bill 228, and I hope that you can represent your constituents in this state and do so.

-Matthew Youkilis