

Testimony on House Bill 796  
House Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:  
Justin Maxwell

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.

I am speaking to you today as a very concerned citizen. Stand Your Ground is a dangerous bill that brings with it an increase in violence anywhere it's enacted. As public servants who have been elected to look after the people of Ohio, I have to believe that cannot be what you want to happen here. So first, let's begin with the facts: Stand Your Ground laws have been found to *increase* homicides and injuries, with no evidence supporting that these laws deter violent crimes. On average, 30 people nationwide are killed each month as a result of SYG. In Florida, the state where this law gained its national infamy after the unjust murder of 16 year old Trayvon Martin (*and I hope it is not lost on anyone here that the bill's proponent testimony was held on the anniversary of Trayvon's death, while the opponent testimony is being held in the middle of a pandemic, as well as in the midst of civil unrest over yet another state-sanctioned murder*), the implementation of SYG has been tied to a 32% increase in firearm homicides, with a 24% increase in homicides overall. In a subsequent study, researchers found a 75% increase in justifiable homicide rates and an estimated 22% increase in unlawful homicide rates. As a 28 year old, I fall into the age group that is most likely to be affected by the passing of this law, with a 36% increase in homicide rates for my age demographic. Furthermore, this law has a way of making previously safe neighborhoods unsafe: SYG was found to have "had the most negative impact on neighborhoods that initially had the lowest homicide rates before the law was enacted." And finally, but most importantly, SYG disproportionately affects communities of color. When white shooters kill Black victims, the resulting homicides are deemed justifiable 11 times more frequently than when the shooter is Black and the victim is white.

I would like to pause there for a moment, on the words "deemed justifiable", and I want you to all think about the Black boys and men whose deaths have been "deemed justifiable" over just the past few years: Trayvon Martin. Eric Gardner. Philando Castile. David McAtee. Tamir Rice. Though these deaths were "deemed justifiable" in the court of law, no sensible person can, in good-faith, claim that any of these murders were justifiable *morally*.

So, "Stand Your Ground". Stand whose ground? Black people who are murdered in this country are *statistically* more likely to have their murder "deemed justifiable", and to have their murderers walk-off scot-free. And as we've seen with the death of George Floyd, whose murderers' fates are still undetermined, and whose death may still be deemed "justifiable", the people of this city, of this state, of this country are putting up with it no more.

So, here is my proposal. "Stand Your Ground". I like the name, but I vehemently disagree with its current text. I think SYG would be much better passed as a law to protect peaceful protestors against the police who incite violence against them. Unarmed, peaceful protestors must be able to legally stand our ground against a violent police force.

So, scrap the bill in its current form; the one that brings with it an increase of homicides, injuries, and violence and disproportionately affects communities of color, and instead pass a bill that protects the citizens you've been elected to serve, especially those who value our seemingly fleeting first amendment, and fear the ever-expanding second.

Thank you,  
Justin Maxwell