

Testimony in Opposition to HB 796, December 8, 2020

Tamara Melnick

Dear Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the committee,

My name is Tamara Melnick and I am a resident of Jackson Township in Stark County, Ohio. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am sharing my testimony in opposition to House Bill 796, a bill which would alter our traditional legal understanding of self-defense and allow armed vigilantism in public.

I became personally concerned with the effects of gun violence and negligent gun ownership in 2018 after the incident at Jackson Memorial Middle School, the school which my daughter now attends. Friends, neighbors, and classmates were there that day, and we experienced first hand the devastation that gun violence brings to a community. My husband is a primary care doctor in Canton and has personally witnessed how firearms related injuries have lifelong consequences for his patients and their families.

The data is clear: states that have enacted Stand Your Ground have seen an increase in gun related incidents, both fatal and nonfatal. This has tremendous costs to our community: medical, emotional, and economic. Each person lost to an unjustified act of gun violence represents medical resources that could have been used elsewhere, a grieving family, and a person who will no longer contribute to their community.

Surveys of crime victims and analyses of shooting incidents provide little evidence that using a gun in self-defense is effective in preventing injuries. A gun in the hands of a member of the public who is unwilling to stand down, even when there is a safe alternative, will only increase the risk in a situation, and will not make anyone safer.

There is no research that supports any public safety benefit to Stand Your Ground. Homicides will go up, and crime will not be deterred. If this bill passes, the burden will fall disproportionately on the most vulnerable people in our state. Studies have shown a significant racial bias in who is perceived as a threat. If a neighbor mistakenly considers my mixed-race husband a threat based on the color of his skin, we would not only lose a caring husband and father, but a doctor who provides desperately needed medical care and comfort in these troubled times.

Not all gun related crimes or accidents can be prevented. That does not mean that we should never try to prevent any. Ohio is not so unique that we cannot learn from the

example of other states. We have a chance to avert a course that will only lead to more Ohio families suffering from the aftereffects of gun deaths and injuries. That is why I urge you to vote no on House Bill 796.