

Testimony on House Bill 796
House Civil Justice Committee

Submitted by: Shannon Winnubst
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Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown and members of the committee, although HB 796 has been introduced so late that it was not possible to submit this testimony twenty-four hours in advance, I still thank you for allowing me to present testimony in opposition to HB 796. I am speaking to you today as a private citizen who opposes this bill because it makes each and every one of us vulnerable to senseless gun violence. This bill makes every person in the State of Ohio less safe, as does every “Stand Your Ground” bill across the nation.

I first learned of the pernicious Stand Your Ground laws through the killing of Trayvon Martin in February 2012—a tragic event that has become all too common since then. By removing the duty to retreat from a confrontation, the Stand Your Ground law broadens the concept of “threat to one’s life” so that any mere hint of a “risk” justifies the use of firearms. It extends the “Castle Doctrine,” which protects the right to use firearms when threatened in one’s home, to allow the use of guns whenever a person perceives a “threat” in the public sphere. In 68% of Florida’s Stand Your Ground cases, the person killed in the disputes was unarmed.¹ From the case of Trayvon Martin in 2012 to the case of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia in 2020, Stand Your Ground laws have enabled a kind of vigilantism that is ravaging our country.

The issue of scientific evidence to prove the effects of gun policies at the state level is difficult and still murky. However, for this single policy, the RAND Corporation’s “Gun Policy in America” concluded that there is “moderate” evidence—the second strongest level of evidence—that these laws are associated with an increase in homicides. Four other studies have come to the same conclusion. Moreover, the implementation of Florida’s Stand Your Ground law was associated with a 32% increase in firearm homicide rates and a 24% increase in overall homicide rates. Of that increase, the largest groups with increased firearm homicide rates were whites (45% increase) and 20-34 year olds (36% increase); it is also associated with an increase in gun violence in suburban counties.² When the issue is the loss of life, I implore you to consider that this is more than sufficient evidence to oppose Stand Your Ground laws.

As we stand here today amidst the everyday news reports about gun homicides and suicides across our nation, I insist that the broad issue of gun violence is not a political issue: it is an ethical issue. Citizens of the United States of America are vulnerable to a wide range of gun violence—no matter our race or class or our place of residence. We must turn back this tide of senseless violence. Please show the moral courage to oppose House Bill 796 and make the State of Ohio a leader in de-escalating firearm violence.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/opinion/stand-your-ground-makes-no-sense.html>

² <https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/09/stand-your-ground-laws-increase-violence.html>