

Testimony on House Bill 796
Civil Justice Committee

Submitted by:
Robin Hawkins

Chairman Hambley, Vice-chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 796. I am writing to you today as the wife of an Emergency Room physician, the mother of an active duty police sergeant and grandmother of five Ohio children. As a life-long Ohioan, I am a voter who supports the second amendment and responsible gun ownership which should ALWAYS include training and proficiency in safe storage and usage. I oppose this bill because it will make ALL Ohioans less safe.

When people choose to arm themselves at home for protection they are exposing themselves and their families to several significant risks: 1) that the firearm could be used against them in a confrontation in which they are overcome or surprised, 2) that the firearm could be accessed and fired by a member of their household 3) unintentionally or 4) used in a suicide attempt, or 5) that it could be stolen and used to commit crimes.

Stand Your Ground aka “no duty to retreat” or “shoot whomever makes you nervous” introduces **even more significant and unacceptable risks for everyone**, not just the gun owner, as the armed person with a false sense of security, erroneously believes they can now protect themselves anywhere they go, and feels **entitled to “protect” themselves** against any low level altercation or disagreement by **shooting the other person “in self-defense”** without any attempt to leave or de-escalate or call for help. It removes the duty to retreat, to attempt to deescalate or summon law enforcement and emboldens hasty and irrevocable, too often fatal actions. It is a false narrative with potentially deadly results. **Current Ohio law already protects** those who must act in self defense against a lethal threat.

The other obvious problem is that this Stand Your Ground bill emboldens armed, self-appointed vigilantes and law enforcement wannabees **to insert themselves into situations** with no training as the “good guy with a gun” who shows up “ready” to shoot. We have seen recent horrific examples of how Stand Your Ground laws helped create situations where armed people felt entitled to chase down unarmed individuals or to verbally accost and then shoot those with whom they are having an argument over a parking place.

Unfortunately when someone does discharge a weapon and calls first responders they then arrive to a scene where there are weapons and too often the “guard” or “good guy with a gun” is **now a target of law enforcement**.

Lastly, the data does not support these laws. Stand Your Ground and Permitless Carry have been demonstrated to increase gun violence everywhere they have been

implemented. I am most familiar with Florida where my husband and I had a second home and one of my sons still lives. 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** as described in recent Journal of the American Medical Association articles (see references below).

We have experienced this threat ourselves. A close family friend, who had nearly been run over in a Florida crosswalk in an affluent neighborhood, was screamed at by the driver of the car. When he approached the car to find out what the driver was saying, the driver reached over to a weapon on the passenger seat and was in the process of raising it to his open window to aim it at our friend who wisely ran away. (FYI: Both were white adult males.) The driver, emboldened by Florida's Stand Your Ground law no doubt thought he could claim he "felt threatened" by the unarmed runner. It is terrifying to contemplate. I added the note about both being white males because these laws are disproportionately enabling the murder of people of color but that fact doesn't seem to reach the mostly white and privileged audience at the statehouse.

It is unconscionable to erode public safety by weakening gun safety laws. Doing so during the current Covid-19 crisis makes it even worse as we now have more first-time gun owners than ever before, more frightened and anxious people. We need help to keep people safe, not more places and people to shoot.

As elected officials empowered to protect the citizens of Ohio, you have a duty to base your decisions on facts, data and the testimony of experts. I hope you can rise to the occasion and defeat this bill.

Thank you,

Robin Hawkins