

## **Testimony on House Bill 796**

House Civil Justice Committee

Submitted by Cynthia Richards

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Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and other members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony. My name is Cynthia Richards. I am a citizen of Ohio, a resident of Clark County and was the Democratic candidate for State Representative, District 79, during the 2020 election. I knew when I declared my candidacy that I was unlikely to win this seat, but I also knew that it was an opportunity to learn about the needs of my community and to educate about key issues. I share in my testimony some of what I learned about gun violence in my community and the concerns about safety and security that many voters in my district have.

When I was running for state representative this past election cycle, I heard from so many of our community members that they do not feel safe and secure in their homes and neighborhoods. In many neighborhoods, they do not feel comfortable letting their children play in the local parks or even riding their bicycles along the sidewalks outside their homes. They find the police slow to respond or ineffective in addressing the threats they experience. They want to sell their homes and move somewhere safer, but they cannot because of concerns about safety and security in their neighborhoods. It makes many of them feel desperate and in despair.

In this context, it is understandable that Stand Your Ground legislation can on the surface seem like a solution. It can be read as empowering local citizens to protect themselves. But that is not the effect of stand your ground legislation in other states. In fact, it leads to an 8% increase in homicide rates, with most of the victims of this legislation being young men. It also leads to unequal application of this law, with people of color being most likely to be prosecuted when it is used, and less likely to benefit from any promise of greater security. In fact, studies suggest that it will increase risk for communities of color.

But it is also not what the citizens I met with are asking for. They are asking for de-escalation not escalation. They are asking for prompter and more effective responses from their local police force. They are asking for the concerns of people in communities with lower incomes to be treated the same as the concerns of people in communities with higher incomes. They are wanting local government to do its job so that they can live peaceful lives and their children can play in local parks again and ride their bikes on the sidewalks outside their homes.

This legislation will only increase risk for the people in Clark County, and the people of Clark County have already experienced too much gun violence. I attended two peaceful marches this summer on two consecutive weekends for victims of gun violence. There I heard the testimony of people in our community who had lost one, sometime multiple, members of their families to gun violence. They were not pleading for stand your ground legislation. They were not asking for looser restrictions on gun ownership. They were asking for a culture of caring and of accountability. They were asking for attention to the needs of all, and the need to enact common sense gun legislation that keeps firearms away from people who should not have firearms. They were asking us to de-escalate the situation, and that means making it our priority to address economic needs and the needs of families and communities to live in peace. That means making sure we support gun policy that serve to promote security and safety and not

undermine it. This legislation will only make the people in Springfield and Clark County less safe. Please do the right thing—the morally responsible thing—and vote against this legislation.