

December 15, 2020

Representative Koehler  
Ohio Statehouse  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

**RE: Opposition for HB 796 - Stand Your Ground Act**

Dear Chair Hambley and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, I strongly oppose House Bill 796 - Stand Your Ground Act. This bill would create a deadly stand-your-ground law removing the duty to retreat before the use of deadly force. Research shows that stand-your-ground laws may increase homicides<sup>1</sup> and when these laws are combined with racial bias that exists within society, they result in the disproportionate killing of Black Americans.<sup>2,3</sup> HB 796 is emblematic of the type of structural racism embedded within our criminal justice system. Stand-your-ground laws are rooted in racism and designed to bolster a system of violence against Black and Brown Americans.

Ohio experiences 526 firearm homicides each year, on average.<sup>4</sup> Given the enormous burden of gun violence in Ohio, it is imperative that Ohio adopts policies that reduce firearm homicides and save lives, but enacting a stand-your-ground law will not accomplish this goal. In fact, studies show that stand-your-ground laws **increase homicide rates** and do nothing to deter crimes. Research found that Florida's stand-your-ground law, enacted in 2005, is associated with a:<sup>5</sup>

- 32 percent increase in firearm homicide rates among adults;
- 24 percent increase in the overall homicide rate among adults; and
- 45 percent increase in adolescent (ages 15-19) firearm homicide.<sup>6</sup>

Stand-your-ground laws allow individuals to use deadly force even when there is an option to safely retreat from a potentially dangerous situation. In essence, these laws create a “shoot-first-ask-questions-later” culture in which a person can take a life when it is unnecessary. The law gives a green light to people with no bias training, no firearms training, and no de-escalation training to use deadly force within a matter of seconds. The degree of danger is determined and filtered through the bias, prejudice, and racism of untrained citizens. Consequently, stand-your-ground laws lead to disproportionate killings of young Black men.

In Georgia, Ahmaud Arbery's young life ended abruptly when two armed white men brutally shot Arbery, who was Black, in broad daylight. The murderers justified the killing by invoking Georgia's stand-your-ground law and no investigation or arrest was made until months later. The arrests only occurred following public outrage and the release of a video capturing the stalking

and shooting. Arbery's senseless killing is the most recent example of how stand-your-ground laws have escalated gun violence, privileged vigilantism over the value of human lives, and justified the unjustifiable killing of unarmed young Black men. Arbery's death was not unique - the reality is that stand-your-ground laws routinely lead to the deaths of innocent Americans, specifically Black men.

Research finds that stand-your-ground laws exacerbate racial disparities regarding those impacted by gun violence. For example, a study of Florida's law found that, compared to White adolescents, over three times as many young Black adolescents ages 15-19 were shot and killed after Florida's stand-your-ground law went into effect.<sup>7</sup> Before the stand-your ground law existed, Black adolescents were twice as likely to be shot and killed compared to their White counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

Our country is embroiled in protests and upheaval following recent killing of unarmed Black Americans. The subsequent protests across this country have once again brought to light the deep inequities within our criminal justice system. Yet, in the midst of this upheaval facing our country, some Ohio legislators are attempting to bolster these racial systems by passing HB 796. To reduce gun violence, we must pass evidence-based policies and reform our criminal justice system, not pass dangerous policies like stand-your-ground laws. We urge lawmakers to reject this dangerous bill which will only increase homicides and further perpetuate racial inequity.

Sincerely,



Ari Davis, MPP  
Policy Analyst  
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence

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<sup>1</sup> [Effects of stand-your-ground-laws on violent crime](#). (2020). *Rand Corporation*

<sup>2</sup> Roman JK. (2013). [Race, justifiable homicide, and stand your ground laws: Analysis of FBI supplementary homicide report data](#). *Urban Institute*.

<sup>3</sup> Degli Esposti M, Wiebe DJ, Gravel J, & Humphreys DK. (2019). [Increasing adolescent firearm homicides and racial disparities following Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' self-defence law](#). *Injury Prevention*.

<sup>4</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. [About Underlying Cause of Death, 1999-2018](#). Five year average 2014-2018.

<sup>5</sup>Humphreys DK, Gasparrini A, & Wiebe DJ. (2017). [Evaluating the Impact of Florida's "Stand Your Ground" Self-defense Law on Homicide and Suicide by Firearm: An Interrupted Time Series Study](#). *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

<sup>6</sup> Degli Esposti M, Wiebe DJ, Gravel J, & Humphreys DK. (2019). [Increasing adolescent firearm homicides and racial disparities following Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' self-defence law](#). *Injury Prevention*.

<sup>7</sup> Degli Esposti M, Wiebe DJ, Gravel J, & Humphreys DK. (2019). [Increasing adolescent firearm homicides and racial disparities following Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' self-defence law](#). *Injury Prevention*.

<sup>8</sup> Degli Esposti M, Wiebe DJ, Gravel J, & Humphreys DK. (2019). [Increasing adolescent firearm homicides and racial disparities following Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' self-defence law](#). *Injury Prevention*.