

Proponent Testimony for S.B. 237

Thank you Chair Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig and Government Oversight and Reform Committee Members for the opportunity to provide testimony today concerning S.B. 237, Duty to Retreat Act.

My name is Judi Phelps. I am a wife, a mom and a small business owner of a training center and shooting range in the Hocking Hills region of southeast Ohio. I possess various industry-certified instructor credentials in both unarmed and armed defense disciplines. I am also an advocate for many causes, most of which concern protecting the vulnerable among us, chiefly women and children.

A primary part of my job is teaching others how to protect themselves if faced with threats or a violent encounter. For example, as part of my concealed carry classes, in addition to teaching the requirements outlined in O.R.C. 2923.125, we also focus on the moral, financial and legal aspects of owning a firearm in Ohio.

The foundation to any self-defense strategy is practicing good situational awareness and understanding that the **only** guaranteed way to survive a critical incident is to **avoid** it in the first place. Beyond that, we really have only two other options: **escape**, when possible; or, **defend** when we're left with no other choice.

Under Ohio's current law, the option to **escape** [retreat] is not only an option, but it's our lawful duty, and the potential penalties for not doing so can have devastating consequences.

As women, particularly, if we are forced to defend ourselves against someone that wishes to do us harm, there is no better option than to be armed with a gun and trained on how to use it. More often than not, we are physically smaller and weaker than our attacker and are often caught off-guard and unaware that we are about to be attacked- all of which places us at extreme risk of bodily injury or death.

Most women believe that if we unwittingly walk into our homes during a burglary in progress or if we are victims of a home invasion that the only priority should be to neutralize that threat before it can do us harm - not try to make a run for it to the nearest exit - or worse - hesitate in some fashion when our very survival may only be measured in seconds if we don't quickly and aggressively respond! While I completely agree with that mindset in spirit, unfortunately, that is not how the law is written today. And it places all of us, especially women, at extreme risk.

In my daily activities I work with women who are in duress in some way which is why they seek me out. They are scared - they are either survivors of previous victimization or they

have an active, perceived (or real) threat and are taking steps to protect themselves in the event it comes to fruition. Why does it have to escalate to this before women take an active role in protecting themselves? Because, based on my experiences, far too many have been brainwashed by a culture that tells us we are “equal”, that it “won’t happen to me” and that we should “fear guns”. All are lies that can get us harmed or killed!

If we really want to protect women, we should be educating them on ways to be proactive and responsible for protecting themselves and the ones they love. We should be honest in telling them that THEY are responsible for their personal security and no one else. We should work to remove barriers that exist in our laws that presume our guilt instead of presuming our innocence if we are forced to defend ourselves. And we should empower women (and men) to utilize whatever defensive tools we deem necessary to protect us from harm.

Human trafficking, domestic violence, “stranger danger” – whatever the criminal element, women are at high risk for being victimized!

Our local community is still reeling from the recent tragedy that occurred just over one week ago when Natalie Nutter, a young mother, was gunned down by her estranged husband for whom she had a court issued Protection Order against. He walked right through that piece of paper and abducted her from her home and subsequently shot and killed her, leaving behind many family and friends, including her young son.

Stories like these are far too frequent. In retrospect, had Natalie, and every other woman like her, been armed and trained and lawfully permitted to stand her ground against this, or any other type of evil, they might still be with us today. My heart breaks for her family and for every other that has had to endure the pain of a loved one coming up missing, dead or having been victimized in some horrific way for which the rest of their lives are adversely impacted.

I urge you to take a stand for women and all law-abiding Ohioans by enacting S.B. 237 into law.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue. What questions do you have for me?