

January 21st, 2020

Senator Coley  
Chairperson, Government Oversight and Reform Committee  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

**Re: Opposition to SB 237**

My name is Lara Kowalcyk. I am a twelfth grader at Grandview Heights High School and a resident of Columbus, Ohio. Further, I am the Students Demand Action co-president of my high school's chapter. Thank you for giving me the time to present my testimony. I am here today to share with you, as an Ohioan and student, I am opposed to SB 237 and its sweeping rollbacks to public safety.

I was here a little over a year ago opposing this bill as a junior in high school. Thankfully, the Ohio General Assembly realized the sweeping rollbacks that this bill would have, however, I am back here today to oppose the same bill. Why are politicians not listening to the people? Do the statistics not provide a convincing enough argument? I am tired of this irresponsible legislation that concerns teenagers. It's my senior year of high school. I should be spending my last moments of school with my peers, however, I am dedicating all of my free time to my Students Demand Action Chapter and speaking up for all Ohioans and young people - something teenagers shouldn't be tasked to do at such a young age.

I have grown up to be conditioned to always know the nearest exit in all my classrooms and how I could barricade the doors to each of my classes. I constantly have this fear of someone coming into my school, favorite coffee shop, and movie theatre. In this America, students have had to come to terms with their own mortality at a young age every time there is a mass shooting. Passing SB 237 will only heighten this feeling in children and teenagers. As politicians, your constituents and their safety needs to be put first.

Stand Your Ground laws allow people to use deadly force in public, even when there is a clear and safe alternative. Stand Your Ground laws can make even everyday encounters between strangers very dangerous. We need laws that help defuse confrontations, not laws that encourage deadly responses that may be based on misperceptions or deep-seated prejudices.

Stand Your Ground laws create an atmosphere in American communities that it is okay to shoot first and ask questions later. This is a huge problem if the confrontation is the result of misperceptions or prejudices. We know from Florida that Stand Your Ground laws have a disproportionate effect on communities of color.

Finally, there has been no evidence that shows Stand Your Ground laws to deter crime. This bill would harm our communities, especially communities of color, and would heighten the fear of gun violence that we already see in Ohio. I should be spending my last few months of

high school with my peers and getting ready to go to college, however, I am burdened with the practice of barricade drills in the case that there is a school shooting. My generation has had to confront the idea of death way too early. This is my “normal” and — just so you know — many other teenagers in this country feel as I do. And like me, many of them will be voting this year, and we will vote.

I want violent behavior in America and Ohio to stop, and I strongly believe that Stand Your Ground laws will not achieve that end. I want laws to help reduce gun violence. I want increased mental health services for our communities. I want my Ohio legislature to become proactive in developing policies that will help to resolve the problem. The proposed Stand Your Ground law would allow individuals to use deadly force in public without any duty to retreat . This bill is a recipe for more shootings, not a policy to reduce the violence that has become way too common.

I am respectfully asking Ohio lawmakers to vote no on SB 237. I hope I can count on you to do that.