

Shela Blanchard

Testimony on Senate Bill 237

Senate Government Oversight Committee

Sen. William P. Coley, II, Chair

Chair Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to SB 237. I am writing to you today as a private citizen constituent from the city of Columbus, Ohio. I oppose this bill because I strongly believe this bill will not keep my family, friends, nor the citizens of Ohio safe. I see this bill as opening the door for a return to a Wild West, “shoot first” environment.

I have lived through the horrors of losing a family member to gun violence. As a woman of color with 2 sons and multiple nephews/nieces and great nephews/nieces, I seriously am fearful for their lives. The threats and harassment they receive because of the color of their skin are terrifying.

My great nephews have experienced racism and targeted threats at a sporting event because of the color of their skin, to the point that they were fearful and had to find a way to escape and run for their lives. This could have turned out so differently. They could have been shot and the shooter could have claimed Stand Your Ground, or they could have used a weapon to “shoot first” rather than retreating. Statistics are clear about who would more likely be exonerated: homicides are deemed justifiable *11 times* more often when the shooter is white and the victim black, than when the shooter is black and the victim white.¹ The odds are stacked against them. They attend school in an affluent Ohio school district, but racism escapes no community.

The fact remains, people of color are looked at as a threat: the color of their skin, tone of voice, stature and size are viewed as threatening. Why? As much as we like to believe that we live in a world where everyone is accepted, unfortunately that is not the case. Society has unjustifiably labeled all for the acts of a few. It is embarrassing that on this day after we honor the legacy of a man who exemplified peace and nonviolence, today we remain a country divided over how to reduce gun violence in our nation and our communities.

Yes, I agree that people should have the right to defend themselves, as already exists in current law. However, if there is an opportunity to prevent escalation, that way should

¹ <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/23856/412873-Race-Justifiable-Homicide-and-Stand-Your-Ground-Laws.PDF>

always be taken first to prevent the loss of life. Since the implementation of Stand Your Ground in Florida, in 79% of the cases, the person who claimed Stand Your Ground could have retreated to avoid confrontation. The person killed in these disputes was unarmed in 68 percent of cases.²

The facts are clear: people of color are disproportionately affected by these senseless gun laws. Removing the duty to retreat from our current self-defense laws will create a Wild West, vigilante environment. I ask that you consider the many lives already lost from Stand Your Ground in other states: according to some studies, 30 people die nationwide every month as a result of these laws.³ We have already suffered far too much from gun violence in the state of Ohio; I know that I have. We do not want our state to make that number go even higher. I urge you to “Do Something” about gun violence in Ohio and vote NO on Stand Your Ground.

Thank you for time.

Shela Blanchard

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/opinion/stand-your-ground-makes-no-sense.html>

³ McClellan, C, Tekin, E. Stand Your Ground laws, homicides, and injuries. *Journal of Human Resources*. 2017; 52(3): 621-653.