

Testimony on Senate Bill 383
Government Oversight and Reform Committee
December 8, 2020
Submitted by: Shela Blanchard

Chair Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to present my testimony in opposition to SB 383. My name is Shela Blanchard, I am a Federal Employee serving our war fighters, a mother, sister, friend, confidant and advocate volunteer with Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense here in Ohio. I live in the city of Columbus. I am here to share with you why, as an Ohioan, I am opposed to SB 383.

I oppose this bill because the facts are clear: modifying traditional self-defense laws to remove the duty to retreat will lead to more gun violence. It will allow people to shoot and kill someone in public, even when they have a safe alternative. The law is clear. This bill is not about protecting people whose life is in real, imminent danger, because Ohio law— traditional self-defense law—already protects them. This bill is about protecting people who want to be vigilantes, who aren't willing to walk away from an argument, or who want to be able to shoot someone who makes them nervous.

As a mother of black son, each time my son leaves home, I have to wonder and pray Lord let him return home alive. My son like thousands of others is a young man with hopes, and dreams of a great future, to make a positive impact in the lives of others. Unfortunately for many their lives continue to be cut short, unjustifiably killed or attacked because of the color of their skin. No matter how many times we remind our children how to respond to police and verbal aggressors, the truth is our black and brown young men and women continued to be unjustifiably beaten, attacked, and killed. How many of you, have “the talk” with your sons and daughters and live in fear of receiving that unwanted phone call any time of day that your child was murdered sitting in their car, returning from the store with a bag of skittles or taking a jog through a neighborhood? You remember the names Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery, Henry Green and Jordan Davis, don't you? These were all young men with hopes and dreams of a bright future who were shot and killed, and whose attackers claimed a “stand your ground” defense. Not only were their lives cut short, they leave behind fathers, mothers, children, and a community devastated by these injustices.

I thought the moral obligation and duty of legislators was to pass bills that would protect all.

Let me share a story of one of the men I spoke of earlier. His mother is Congresswoman Lucy McBath. Jordan was like any other teenage boy; he had hopes and dreams for a future. He had a good solid upbringing with a strong spiritual foundation. He loved life and he was the light for her family. In 2012, 17-year-old [Jordan Davis](#) was shot and killed in Jacksonville, Florida, when

Michael Dunn confronted him about how loud his music was. At the trial, Dunn claimed a **Stand Your Ground Law** defense. Dunn claimed that Davis threatened him and that he believed he had a gun, but police never found a gun on Davis or in his car.

On what would have been his 25th birthday, Lucy wrote this letter:

Dear Jordan,

Eight years ago, you were stolen from me. The last conversation we had seemed so normal. You told me how much you had enjoyed Thanksgiving, and that you loved being able to see your friends. I had no idea that would be the last time I heard your voice.

I never got to kiss you goodbye. I never got to give you one final hug. We never celebrated your 18th or 21st birthday because you were stolen from me at just 17 years old. Today would have been your 25th - and I still miss you every single day.

I want you to know I'm proud of you. If you were still here, I'd tell you how proud I am of the person you've become - how happy I am of the kind & caring man you've grown up to be. You'd have jokingly told me to knock it off. If you were here. If our laws had not failed you.

We never got to celebrate the big milestones in your life b/c you were taken from us too early.

Since then, I've worked to honor you. I've taken your legacy to Congress to fight for common sense gun safety. We're fighting every day, Jordan. We're making a change, together.

You live on through me. And I live on because of you. Today, you would have been 25 years old.

Happy birthday, Jordan. I miss you. I love you so much.

Your mom,

Lucy

Like Lucy, I have lived through the devastation of losing a family member to gun violence. As a black mother of sons, numerous nieces/nephews and great nephews/nieces, I stand before you today in great concern for their future. I am gravely concerned for their future lives and the young black men and women throughout the state of Ohio. Some of them have already experienced firsthand verbal attacks because of the color of their skin.

The odds are stacked against my brothers and sisters in this nation. The fact remains, people of color are looked at as a threat; the color of our skin, tone of our voice, stature and size are viewed as threatening? Why? As much as we like to believe that we live in a nation where everyone is accepted, unfortunately that is not the case.

This is an ongoing issue in our community and our nation. If it were not for a video released several weeks after Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old unarmed black man who was shot and killed after being pursued by Gregory McMichael and Travis McMichael, two white men, on Feb 23,

2020, his killers may have been protected by the Stand Your Ground law in Georgia.^[1] Is this what we want for the state of Ohio?^[2]

I ask you today as you consider your duty and obligation as a legislator for all Ohioans, to consider the many lives lost from dangerous policies in other states and right here in our city. Not only remember their names but take action that will not allow these acts to occur or continue to occur here in the state of Ohio. Jordan Davis, Ahmaud Arbery, Travon Martin, Henry Green, Breonna Taylor; plus the 9 victims of the Dayton mass shooting. We have been asking since the Dayton Mass Shooting for you to “Do Something” to reduce gun violence. Eliminating the Duty to Retreat will only increase it. Please vote no on SB 383.

Thank you for your time.

Shela Blanchard

[1] [Ron Davis 'shook' by Ahmaud Arbery shooting video calls for justice | firstcoastnews.com](https://www.firstcoastnews.com/news/ron-davis-shook-by-ahmaud-arbery-shooting-video-calls-for-justice/)

[2] Please see https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/_stand_your_ground_kills_-_how_these_nra-backed_laws_promote_racist_violence_1.pdf