

Mitchell Pinsky Group Leader of Students Demand Action at The Ohio State University & Students Demand Action National Advisory Board

Free speech and the right to assemble are two of the pillars of our democracy. Throughout history, protest and the ability to assemble have been catalysts for change in the United States. Specifically, the ability to protest and catalyze change **freely** has been a unique and defining pillar of the United States. If enacted, HB 22 would limit Ohioans' ability to protest freely due to the limits it puts on the actions protesters can engage in.

I am most concerned about two parts of the bill that would make it a felony to taunt an LEO (law enforcement officer), and to throw an object or substance at LEO given that they are extremely vague. What exactly defines taunting? Oftentimes, protesters will use chanting as a way to get their message across. Given the vagueness of the bill, it seems to me that an LEO can arrest an individual if they, for example, engage in chanting, especially if they disagree with the message. Protesters should not be arrested for the words they use, especially because it could possibly result in an infringement of their right to free speech. Next, what defines an object or substance? Given the current vague definition, an object could include something harmless such as flowers or confetti. Are we seriously about to penalize using harmless forms of expression to protest?

Another portion of the bill I am worried about is who the bill would be more likely to be used against. Given the implicit bias that plagues our society and the past actions of LEOs, I am greatly concerned that the penalties associated with HB 22 would be disproportionately used against marginalized communities. Marginalized communities have already historically faced tools of oppression and do not need to face another tool of oppression.

Overall, HB 22 is a vague piece of legislation that both undermines the freedoms of free speech and assembly, and will most likely be used as yet another tool of suppression against marginalized communities in the fight for equal rights for **all** Americans.