

**Sam Woodring**  
**Opponent Testimony on House Bill 22**  
**House Criminal Justice Committee**  
**March 17, 2021**

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written-only, opponent testimony in consideration of House Bill 22 (HB 22). I am a 22-year-old disabled advocate dedicated to multiracial movements for justice and liberation. I—like many Ohioans—have engaged in peaceful protest, and I want to speak to you today about the negative implications of HB 22 on everyday citizens.

I'm a proud, lifelong citizen of Ohio. I've grown up watching the impact of peaceful protests led from all communities, including churches, BIPOC folks, LGBTQ+ folks, and many more. Peaceful protests, marches, and sit-ins serve a unique and important role in Ohio: to uplift the voices of those who have not been heard. Like so many of my loved ones, I have attended these marches and peaceful protests in hopes of drawing attention to the injustices in our world.

Today, I urge you to vote against HB 22 to preserve Ohioans' right to peaceably assemble and speak freely. This opposition can and should be bipartisan, as it could seriously impact Ohioans on all parts of the political spectrum and could inflate state and local spending. In this testimony, I will consider two major issues in depth:

- 1. Increased Risk of Injury, Death, and Incarceration** especially for people with disabilities, people who are LGBTQ+, BIPOC individuals, other marginalized and oppressed people, and people with identities at the intersection of several oppressed groups.
- 2. An Increase in Unnecessary, Frivolous Arrests**, leading to inflated spending on policing and corrections, despite clear interest in police divestment and/or reform.

**Increased Risk of Injury, Death, and Incarceration:**

While the impetus behind HB 22 may have good intentions to protect law enforcement officers in the line of duty, it could cause serious rights violations. As you know, HB 22 would expand the definition of “obstruction of justice” to include diverting a law enforcement officer’s attention as well failing to follow a lawful order. This expansion will include large-scale events of many kinds, including peaceful protest and public witness. Simply “annoying” or “distracting” an officer would qualify for penalty under this law. Throwing confetti, glitter, or flowers—all items utilized for a variety of reasons—could result in an arrest.

This bill notes that “intent” is key, but how can intent be determined in such a stressful environment? Some people with disabilities—such as Deaf individuals or individuals with mental, intellectual, or developmental disabilities—may not be able to expressly or quickly communicate their intent to officers, especially when under duress. What safeguards would this bill implement to protect BIPOC Ohioans with disabilities—those who would be impacted most by this legislation—to ensure these folks are not injured, killed, or jailed by police simply

because they “annoyed” or “distracted” an officer making an arrest in an already crowded area? We must consider questions like this to prevent needless injuries and deaths from statute that would inevitably restrict Ohioans’ right to assemble.

Last year, I witnessed the brutalization of countless Black and brown Ohioans at the hands of law enforcement. I watched the families of innocent Black men who were killed by police as they shared their grief in hopes of a united, liberated Ohio. As Americans and Ohioans, we must do everything in our power to uplift these voices and demand accountability from both institutions and individuals. If this bill becomes law, we will undoubtedly see increased use of force against citizens, especially BIPOC individuals<sup>1</sup>, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, all of whom are more likely to be injured or killed by police<sup>2</sup>—often without ever committing a crime.

### **Unnecessary, Frivolous Arrests Leading to Inflated Spending on Policing and Corrections:**

Law enforcement is responsible for their own actions—be it an incomplete arrest or unlawful use of force. HB 22 would shift the responsibility from officers to individual Ohioans by allowing officers to assume intent, and penalize Ohioans doing something completely harmless and possibly completely unrelated to an officer’s detainment. Current law already penalizes violent and obstructive individuals, making HB 22 an attempt to legislate actions that do not harm officers or bystanders.

Following 2020, it’s clear that citizens want police to be accountable to those they serve, not handed additional power. In 2020, Columbus’s Division of Police accounted for 37% of the city’s entire operating budget—about \$359 million in total. That’s more than 10 times as much as all development initiatives (totaling \$30 million) and 13.5 times as much as all health expenditures amidst a worldwide pandemic (totaling ~\$27 million).<sup>3</sup> Data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that, in 2018, local governments in Ohio spent more on policing than any other line item except education.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, Ohio’s police are extremely well-funded, so they have more than enough equipment and personnel to carry out their job without the addition of a bill that will fundamentally restrict Ohioans’ freedoms. Additional, frivolous arrests cost taxpayers countless dollars each year. Legislation like HB 22 contributes to the phenomenon we’ve seen over the last 25 years, wherein Ohio’s crime rates for non-violent and violent crimes alike have fallen, but the prison

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<sup>1</sup> As described in a peer-reviewed study in PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America): <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/34/16793>

<sup>2</sup> People with disabilities comprise ~20% of the population, but 33-50% of people killed by police.

<sup>3</sup> According to the city’s 2020 Adopted Budget:

[https://www.columbus.gov/uploadedFiles/Columbus/Departments/Finance\\_and\\_Management/Document\\_Library/Adopted\\_Budgets/2020%20Adopted%20Budget%20Summary.pdf](https://www.columbus.gov/uploadedFiles/Columbus/Departments/Finance_and_Management/Document_Library/Adopted_Budgets/2020%20Adopted%20Budget%20Summary.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Per the “Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances,” found here:

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/gov-finances.html>

population has grown 23.2% in that same time period<sup>5</sup>, which is nearly five times as much as Ohio's total population growth.<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, HB 22 will intimidate peaceable protestors seeking justice. HB 22 is a dangerous look into what Ohio may look like if you take measures to restrict the voices of our citizens. I urge you to halt the passage of HB 22.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony as an opponent to HB 22. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these issues further, I can be reached at [samanthakwoodring@gmail.com](mailto:samanthakwoodring@gmail.com) or 614-562-3462.

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<sup>5</sup> As documented by LSC from 1994-2018:

<https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/documents/reference/current/ohiofacts/2018/justiceandpublicsafetysystems.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ohio's population was 11.11 million in 1994, and 11.68 million in 2018, a 5% increase:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OH/PST045219>