

Rev. Terry Williams of The Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Testimony for March 17, 2021 Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee Hearing on House Bill 22

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for taking time today to allow me to share testimony concerning House Bill 22.

My name is The Reverend Terry Williams. I am an Ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, and I currently serve as Lead Pastor of Orchard Hill United Church of Christ in Chillicothe. As a Christian pastor, I am called to ministries of preaching, spiritual care, faith formation, and teaching within my local congregation.

In addition to my work in the parish, I am a faith organizer with the Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and a member of Ohio Clergy for Choice, a group of clergy and religious leaders from across Ohio who support a person's ability to access a full range of reproductive health services, including safe and legal abortion.

As religious people of conscience, the members of our organization often find themselves called to actions of public witness. In actions of public witness, we most often exercise all three elements of the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, and our freedom to peaceably assemble.

We cannot divorce our religion from the exercise of the other elements of public witness; we participate in actions of public witness because our faith calls us to act.

We cry out for the hungry when they have no strength to cry out for themselves. We demand justice for those who are wronged by the state when they have lost their voice through violence. We demand a better world for our children and the children of our neighbors – one in which no person's religion will forcibly limit the rights, freedoms, and thriving of another person.

HB22 is an attack on the freedom of religious speech. An unnecessary bill that deals with behavior already well defined in Ohio's criminal law, HB22 represents a dangerous and confusing muddying of the waters between reasonable limitations on free speech and state totalitarianism.

A key pillar of the work of Reproductive Justice – a Black Woman-led movement that Ohio RCRC supports and uplifts as holy – is the conviction that human beings have the right to parent the children they have in safe and healthy environments free from state-sanctioned violence.

When the government at any level begins to create unsafe and unhealthy environments for the children of our community, **we will push back with holy actions of public witness**. It is not only our constitutional right, but our religious duty to resist oppression, reject state-sanctioned violence, and to press with all our might toward the goal of liberation for every person being harmed by unwise and unholy government decisions.

HB22 will escalate to felony status certain actions against the state that are already illegal, resulting in increased incarceration of people who disagree with the agenda of the government of the day. This brutal tactic of targeting opposition voices for incarceration is a page from the totalitarian playbooks of the ruthless & the weak – dictators and puppet regimes that know they cannot withstand the honest scrutiny of the voice of The People, and who thereby seek to silence those voices.

While our state prisons remain filled with non-violent offenders and offenders who are disproportionately people of color, HB22's sponsors sit today wondering how to fill our prisons with even more bodies of human beings who disagree with the state.

Ohio deserves better than this sham attempt at totalitarianism.

Ohio deserves better than HB22.

Please, for the love of all that is holy, reject HB22 for what it is: an unnecessary and dangerous attempt to subvert the freedoms of Ohio citizens. VOTE NO on HB22 and get back to doing the very important work of making policy that helps all Ohioans thrive.

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