

**Written Testimony on House Bill 22**  
**By Catherine Turcer, Common Cause Ohio**  
**Before the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee**

Common Cause Ohio opposes House Bill 22 (HB 22) which attacks our free speech rights, intentionally chilling the act of protesting by threatening those individuals with overly harsh criminal penalties.

In Ohio, we have always enjoyed our right to peacefully protest. Time and time again, non-violent protests have been at the heart of moving our state and our nation forward. HB 22 is a giant leap in the wrong direction, trampling on the rights of Ohioans simply because some do not like the message or the fashion in which protesters are making their voices heard. Regardless of the message, non-violent protest is protected speech.

Additionally, by expanding the offense of Obstructing Justice to include often frivolous claims such as failure to follow an order from a law enforcement officer and intent to distract an officer, HB 22 adds harsh penalties for typically harmless peaceful protest activities like throwing glitter or confetti at Pride parades. HB 22 also fails to define “use of force” which has been known to be an excuse for Police to harm or even kill people (especially people of color). This heavy-handed legislation imposes jail time and fees for offenses commonly used as a pretext to arrest non-violent protesters or to target non-violent acts of civil disobedience serves only to exacerbate our overly high incarceration rates.

Law enforcement already has the tools necessary to respond to violent criminals and vigilantes. Instead of addressing the demands of public safety organizations, HB 22 would only make the jobs of law enforcement harder by adding fuel to the fire in dangerous situations.

In this important moment in our history, amidst calls for racial justice and an end to police violence, the bill sponsors have chosen to ignore those calls and instead has prioritized punishing the people courageous enough to speak out. Support for HB 22 will leave the General Assembly on the wrong side of history when it comes to the advancement of racial justice and equality.

HB 22 could also have far-reaching and long-term consequences well beyond the particular protests this measure targets since depending on the timing of arrest could prevent people from having access to their ballot during election season. It serves no purpose other than to quell First Amendment rights, now and in the future. We should be encouraging Ohioans to use their voices to strengthen our democracy, not telling them to suppress their calls for justice.

We urge the committee to vote no.