

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 22.

Criminal Justice Committee Chair, the honorable Jeff LaRe, Vice Chair, the honorable D. J. Swearingen, and Ranking minority member, the honorable David Leland, my name is Randy Cunningham, I live at 3623 West Blvd in Cleveland, Ohio 44111 and I wish to express my opposition to House Bill 22 for the following reasons.

First, this legislation is not necessary. It is a pile on bill to protect law enforcement officers from actions that may occur during a protest or demonstration, when there are plenty of laws that do the same thing. It feeds upon a myth that law enforcement officers are defenseless and besieged by protesters and will be totally overwhelmed by them without legislation such as House Bill 22. I have been to a lot of demonstrations in my life, more than any of the members of the Criminal Justice Committee. Which gives me the credentials and expertise to comment on the realities of demonstrations and protests. Who has the upper hand in such events? Protesters or law enforcement officers? The protesters may have righteous anger at the events they are protesting. They may have cardboard placards, sharpie felt pens, and banners. But other than the clothes on their backs and shoes on their feet, they have nothing. Now let us look at the police. They have guns. They have tasers. They have zip tie handcuffs. They have body armor, shields, and helmets with visors. But most important of all, is that they have much greater power than any normal citizen enjoys. In fact, one of the reasons for last summer's protests, is the perception that for all practical matters, the police are above the law, or any accountability for their actions. Back to the question. In a confrontation between protesters and police, which side would you rather be on? It is a no brainer. I would rather be on the side of the police. And if law enforcement personnel feel terrified of protesters, they should consider other career opportunities.

Finally, we should recognize that House Bill 22 is a part of a blitzkrieg of laws that have been submitted, and no doubt will be added to, in reaction to last summer's protests regarding the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Now the proponents of these laws will shout from the rooftops that these laws are not aimed at outlawing peaceful protests and demonstrations. To hear them speak, you would swear that they are all charter members of the ACLU. They are correct that nothing in these laws explicitly outlaws demonstrations and protests. However, the goal of these laws is not to murder the right to protest. It is to regulate the right to protest to death, and to surround it with so many legal hazards that any reasonable person will think many times over before they will attend a protest no matter how passionate they may feel about the issue. If you can intimidate people from exercising a right, you have accomplished the same thing as revoking that right. No people, no protest, no problem.

This is your opportunity to show that your rhetoric about the right to protest is backed by conviction or is just empty words. Vote against this petty and unnecessary legislation.

Thank you.