

I am an Ohio resident and voter who is a teacher, writer, and activist who peacefully, and with great respect for human rights, attends civil rights actions for racial justice in Ohio. I am writing to oppose HB22. I have attended many peaceful public marches and rallies in solidarity with Black and Brown Ohioans and people across the United States, especially in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. I know that HB22 will infringe on my rights to freedom of assembly and speech and puts my peaceful action into a state of continual fear.

The provisions of HB22 contain overly broad, vague language that gives law enforcement too wide of discretion for arrest of peacefully assembled people, and thus can be used to stifle or preemptively curtail political speech. It does not define 'use of force' and thus means an officer can frivolously arrest any assembled person making any kind of raised hand gesture. It also creates a nebulous category of criminalizing the placement of objects in space anywhere near an officer, which overly restricts people's rights to assembly and movement, especially in spaces where police officers routinely restrict movement. One instance is the police technique of containing protestors in small spaces called "free speech zones," which are then guarded by officers. If someone complies with an officer's request to enter a space such as this and then sets down their water bottle on the ground while helping their child tie their shoe, that person could be criminally charged for this action under the object provision of HB22. So could their child. This is the type of frivolous, unjust arrest and criminal charge that will become routine if HB22 is passed: criminalizing innocent, peaceful people and creating conditions for assembly where people are so fearful of frivolous arrest that people fear to exercise their rights. It is not just me who will be affected, but the generations of young people inspired to collective action by the freedom movements of the last decade will be hurt and punished by this bill, as will the many everyday Ohioans inspired and activated to justice: all of us are constituents, Ohioans, voters, and Americans who deserve our constitutional rights to be respected.

I implore you to oppose HB22, which gives overly broad discretionary power to officers and will curtail hallowed first amendment rights of assembly and speech for the many Ohioans who exercise these rights to petition the government.