



## TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HB 22

Ohio House of Representatives  
Government Oversight and Reform Committee  
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Chairman LaRe and Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, I am Rev Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr. I represent, one of the oldest state ecumenical councils in the country, The Ohio Council of Churches, as its Executive Director. The Ohio Council of Churches is a partnership of 17 Christian denominations in 23 different organizational configurations throughout the state of Ohio. As the executive director of the 102-year-old Ohio Council of Churches, I am privileged to work with Christian denominational leaders and officials who have a habit of taking seriously the words, values, and lifestyle of Jesus Christ as proclaimed and modeled in the Holy Scriptures.

One of the most enduring and impactful teachings of Jesus focused on the essentials of faithful living. In the 22nd chapter of Matthew, Jesus endured a quiz administered by established religious leadership, a test designed to embarrass him. These leaders, including one lawyer, asked Jesus which commandment of the law was the greatest. Not missing a beat and surely to the chagrin of those leading the proceedings, Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, this is the first commandment." Immediately, he gave the following as a second commandment: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I would submit to you that most Christians would not deem it robbery to do their best to adhere to the words, values, and lifestyle of Jesus, who is, of course, the head of the church. Out of an abundance of willingness to be faithful to Jesus, Christians all over the world, including Ohio, do their best to love God and to love their neighbors.

These levels of love present urgent questions: Who are our neighbors? What are we Christians to do when we observe the unfair treatment of our neighbors?

It is clear to us that all of humanity are our neighbors, and we are to love each with the same intensity devoted to loving ourselves. Inasmuch as none of us would want or accept injustice for ourselves, we refuse to want or accept it for anyone else, particularly the most vulnerable among us. For this reason, we choose to practice our faith in ways that issue public rebuke of policies and practices that dehumanize and at times destroy our neighbors intentionally or unintentionally. Of course, there are times when this rebuke leads us to protest in an organized and public fashion, as protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

It is dramatically clear to me that HB 22 was surgically crafted to silence dissenting public voices and collective witness. Under HB 22 one can pick up a felony charge just by distracting a police officer during peaceful public witness. Obstruction of justice is defined so broadly under the law that it can be applied to someone for merely throwing confetti or flowers.

Over the past year many Ohioans were brutalized by police during peaceful protest events. This fact is well documented. I believe it not unreasonable that laws pertaining to protest should be designed to protect the American people, and not criminalize and penalize us for practicing our First Amendment rights.

Distinguished legislators, I believe Ohioans with dissenting voices must not be discouraged from making their voices heard through public protest. Furthermore, I maintain that Ohioans with dissenting views must be protected. Finally, as HB 22 represents a clear threat to free speech, I ask that your refuse to let HB 22 pass.