

Dear Criminal Justice Committee:

As a voter in Ashtabula County, Ohio, please consider this my official testimony opposing HB 22 which would increase penalties for participating in protests.

I know that criminalization efforts such as these have worked against the voice of Justice and silenced marginalized communities through severe consequences for innocuous actions. I know that these laws are used to target dissenting voices with the harshest penalties imposed on organizers and protestors who are Black and Brown here in Ohio. I know these penalties have long lasting effects and oppression to Black and Brown folks.

This is a clearly an unconstitutional imposition to existing laws against voicing our issues. There are already similar bills on the books, no need for new ones. The events on Jan. 6th must never be used as example of "what can happen" when protests "get out of hand"... when there is ample evidence to prove that off and on-duty Capital police, legislators, and special interest groups colluded to commit an act of treason. Because those treasonous actions were committed by white people and funded by billionaires, they have faced minimal consequences. Alternately, this bill would justify criminalizing actual protesters whose mission is uplifting the voices of the actually marginalized communities of our state. Freedom of speech and protest are Constitutional rights as well as human rights. For those reasons and many more, I demand that you halt and oppose this bill from moving forward and take a good hard look at reality. Dissent is important and necessary in order to maintain a functioning democracy. The people are saying, "We want more than a police state. We deserve more than being criminalized for demanding a just society that does not allow for Black and Brown people to be hunted and killed by the state!" Hear us!! Oppose this bill!!!

Sincerely,  
Julie Boetger  
Ashtabula County Voter