



National Congress of Black Women
Greater Cleveland Chapter *Women Making A Difference*

POSITION PAPER

April 18, 2021

Dear Ohio Legislature:

Our Country was founded on the concept of civil disobedience. Our forefathers believed at the core that an unjust government should be held to task by its citizens through protest. We fought a war to obtain our Independence from an unjust government and worked diligently to form a more perfect union. Our Country was founded on the concepts of civil disobedience and now our elected officials are seeking to limit a concept that has been an American value since the inception of our Country.

House Bill 22 seeks to criminalize civil disobedience and limit first amendment free speech. House Bill 22 increases protections for law enforcement at the expense of the civil liberties of the very citizens law enforcement is meant to protect and serve. This is an injustice that is un-American in every sense of the word.

By adding additional language to the criminal offense of obstructing official business, House Bill 22 criminalizes free speech, the right to assemble and civil disobedience. Striking a police officer is already illegal and a felony offense of assault on a police officer, so adding in 2921.32(B)(1) “taunt or strike a law enforcement officer” is redundant for the “striking” element, so what the bill is actually criminalizing is the “taunting” of law enforcement. The first amendment right to free speech was so critical to the establishment of this Country that it was the first amendment our Founders added. They believed that the freedom of speech was critical to our government. Seeking to add a restriction preventing the “taunting” of police officers infringes on that free speech. We can disagree with the practice of “taunting” and officer, but at the end of the day it is a Constitutional right which should not be restricted unnecessarily.

During the COVID pandemic we saw anti-maskers taunt on the steps of this very legislature officers seeking to keep those inside of this building safe. And while many of us understood the importance of wearing a mask, these individuals had a right to express their dismay through civil disobedience which included the “taunting” of police officers. This legislation would criminalize the actions of some of the individuals you have been elected to represent.

Likewise, provisions 2921.32(B)(3) would again have applied to the anti-mask protestors who took to the steps of government. Through media reporting we saw how those protestors restricted law enforcement officers from doing their job. And again, while we may not agree with their

positions or tactics, their actions should not be criminalized merely because we disagree with them.

Civil liberties and freedom is not easy. Sometimes it means allowing things that we are not comfortable with to occur so that we do not infringe upon the rights of others. Protests and civil disobedience are perhaps one of the most American things a citizen can engage in. These are values our Country was founded on. And while we may not always agree with the methods, those methods should not be criminalized. We urge you to protect the Constitutional rights of our citizens. Citizens should be valued over a profession.

Sincerely,

Ruth I. Gray President/Founder
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