



Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony for House Bill 22.

My name is Siobhan Boyd-Nelson, and I am the acting Executive Director for Equality Ohio, our state's LGBTQ+ advocacy and education organization. Equality Ohio strongly opposes this bill and other efforts to limit the right to protest in Ohio.

First, we must recognize that this bill, above all else, is not one meant to increase the security of Ohioans or even protect law enforcement officers, but to send a firm and intentional rebuke of the uprisings we saw last summer in support of Black Lives and against police brutality and racism. The language used in this bill and the context in which it was introduced show that this bill is meant to send a message of retaliation and aggression to those who marched peacefully against racism and discrimination.

HB22 creates crimes for actions that are already illegal under Ohio law and seeks to impose unreasonable penalties for those found guilty of committing them. We know from the past 50 years of criminal justice research that increased sentences and multiplied charges do not prevent crime, but simply incarcerate more people for longer periods of time.

Because this bill seeks to further criminalize actions that are already illegal through vague, undefined language, it will have the practical, chilling effect of deterring and inhibiting Constitutionally protected free speech. For those whom it does not deter, its passage will lead to more police-citizen interactions. For LGBTQ+ Ohioans and Ohioans of color, those interactions are often dehumanizing and at their worst, deadly.

Though it is mostly symbolic, the message this bill sends is clear. It is not about making good policy or protecting the people of Ohio. It is about further ostracizing those who have had the courage to march for justice after so many police killings of Black Americans both here in Columbus and around the country. The impact of this message, however, is an exacerbation of the very problems that brought the protestors to the streets in the first place. Far from removing protestors from the streets, this bill invites further action to protect the rights and lives of the most vulnerable.

The Stonewall Uprising of 1969, which is often credited with beginning the modern LGBTQ+ equality movement, was a protest against police violence started by transgender women of color. People of color have always been at the forefront of the LGBTQ+ equality movement, and they have also always been targeted for it. We simply would not be where we are today without them. Legislation like HB22 hinders the important progress and social outcry that has always been essential to pushing our country toward its highest aim of liberty and justice for all.

As a state and as a country, we should be working to heal the wounds of generations of racism and police abuse of Black people. We should be developing policies that help counter that history with a promise of equal justice for all Ohioans and reaffirming our sacred right to protest



and voice our displeasure when those charged with serving us fail to do so. This bill achieves none of those aims and instead will be used to rationalize even more police violence against LGBTQ+ Ohioans and people of color.

I urge opposition to HB22 and implore this committee to work with communities most impacted by police violence to develop good policies that will help address the very real public health crisis of racism in our state.