

Testimony against HB22
Criminal Justice Committee
April 21, 2021

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and other members of the Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for affording me the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB 22.

I am a Columbus resident, concerned constituent, and advocate for social rights. I have participated in many peaceful protests in Ohio. Throughout history peaceful protests have allowed men and women to express their rights to free speech. The Women's suffrage protest and hunger strikes gave women the rights to vote as well as the protest of the Civil Rights movement.

As a citizen who chooses to exercise my First Amendment rights to speech and assembly, I am opposed to any bill that seeks to suppress or penalize peaceful assembly and expression, including HB 22.

57 years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, after many years of peaceful demonstrations of protest. The people endure water hoses, club beatings, dogs, all for the right to heard. Here we are in 2021 facing similar treatment of manipulation and scare tactics in attempt to silence our voices. I so thought we were beyond those days, this bill and others appear to prove me wrong.

The **First Amendment** protects many forms of expression, including the right to **free speech**, participating in demonstrations like protests and marches, leafleting, chanting, drumming and dancing.

Freedom of assembly is the constitutionally protected right to organize. Meaning... that American citizens are within their right, per the Constitution, to assemble for the purpose of peacefully protesting the actions of their government.

The Ohio Revised Code ORC 2917.11 addresses prohibited conduct. ORC 2921.31 addresses Obstructing official business ORC 2903.13 addresses Assault and ORC 2921.33 Resisting arrest. These codes address most if not all issues that could potentially, not likely arise at a protest.

The addition of felony penalties to peaceful activities like throwing glitter or confetti is an overly punitive approach that further animosity and adds distrust between communities and law enforcement. The language of the new felony activity in this bill is subjective and will be even more so in the context of a large gathering of citizens.

As stated above in the ORC there are already ways to prosecute rioting and assaults on police officers. There is no need to escalate tensions the way that HB 22 would do. From a concerned citizen perspective, increasing fines and prison time only exacerbates the negative overall economic impact.

This Bill serves no purpose other than to further restrict our right to free speech. I respectfully request your no vote on HB22.

Shela Blanchard