

Jeff LaRe

House Criminal Justice Committee

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Opposing House Bill 22

Hello Chairman LaRe, Ranking member Leland, and the entire House Criminal Justice Committee. My name is Anna Valerius, I use she/her pronouns and I am here as a representative of the Undergraduate Student Government at The Ohio State University. As Vice President of the Undergraduate Student Body at The Ohio State University, I have the unique opportunity to represent and speak on behalf of 53,557 undergraduate students not only at the Columbus campus, but at all of the branch campuses across Ohio located in Newark, Marion, Mansfield, Wooster and Lima. We work with student organizations, faculty, administration and the Columbus Community to address the concerns and passions of every Buckeye. As a representative of these students, I am here to strongly **OPPOSE** the House Bill 22, a bill disguised in its short title as “expanding the offense of obstructing justice” when in reality, House Bill 22 would, alongside other provisions, create measures that would prevent people from exercising their First Amendment right in Ohio and set a dangerous and disgraceful precedent of limiting First Amendment rights that fellow states would see as justification for violating the freedom of its citizens.

As Jacob Chang, the President of The Ohio State Student Body, focused broadly on various sections of House Bill 22 in opposition of House Bill 22, I want to focus specifically in my time on lines 28-31 of H.B. 22 which states that: Prevent or obstruct any person, by means of force, intimidation, or deception, from performing any act to aid in the discovery, apprehension, or prosecution of the other person or child, and lines 34-38 which states: No person shall do any of the following to a law enforcement officer in the performance of the law enforcement officer's duties with reckless disregard as to whether the action diverts or obstructs the law enforcement officer's attention. These sections within H.B. 22 infringe upon Ohioans civil liberties as by the First Amendment within the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights to record law enforcement. The First Amendment grants all Americans the freedom of speech and in doing so we have the ability to criticize the government granting us the right to criticize the police as well. In addition, we have the freedom of press, which applies to citizen journalists and documentarians just as it does to formal members of the press. Because of both of our freedoms granted to us by the First Amendment it is within our right to record law enforcement, however H.B. 22 would limit us from doing so.

In the times where police officers enter marginalized communities, recording is one of the only ways that we can potentially ensure the police remain accountable after a potentially

violent incident occurs. The ability to record any police interaction is a necessary right, and often times, it is the only action we can take to ensure that accountability is a possibility for potential harm.

This is a privilege that I had to consider as a little white girl growing up. If I were to reach for my phone to record a traffic stop or any police confrontation, I could do my part to protect my step-dad, who is Black. This was a privilege I had to use to ensure the survival of my family. This speaks volumes to the state of policing in our community, and this disparity and need for accountability speaks to the detrimental impact if House Bill 22 passes today.

As a representative of The Ohio State University Student Body, I strongly urge you all to join me in opposing House Bill 22 as this bill would permit abuse against the First Amendment rights of all citizens, regardless of their race although this limitation, if passed, would drastically endanger the lives of our Black and Brown, LGBTQ+, Disabled, and homeless community members and constituents. For the benefit of the students we represent and the citizens of Ohio, we urge the committee to OPPOSE this bill. Thank you for your time and this opportunity to testify. If you have any questions, I am more than hear to answer anything.