

To the House Criminal Justice Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. I am writing to express my concerns with House Bill 22.

The first part of the bill is “Failure to follow a lawful order” from a law enforcement officer.

I often attend marches, vigils, concerts, and other public gatherings. I have hearing loss most likely brought on by a concussion I sustained in a bicycle accident as a child. Often, at public gatherings, I can’t understand words being spoken through a bullhorn or a public address system. I can hear the sounds, but I can’t make out the words being spoken. The same thing happens even if people’s speech is not amplified, even if the person is very close to me. There is something about background noise that makes it difficult for my brain to process sounds.

At most events, it is likely that I would not be able to hear and understand a law enforcement officer’s orders, and so would not have a chance to comply. It is terrifying to think that I could be arrested, prosecuted, fined, and/or imprisoned because I couldn’t understand what a police officer is saying. In addition, it seems that arresting people who are deaf or hearing impaired, for not following an officer’s order that they couldn’t hear, would be a violation of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination and requires reasonable accommodations.

For these reasons and more, I urge you to reject House Bill 22.

Sincerely,

Karen Sottosanti