

Chair LeRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the Criminal Justice Committee. I am Laurel Kerr and live in Centerville, Ohio. I am here to speak in opposition to HB 22.

My dear husband of 36 years does not like to be corrected on his driving. It's a touchy subject, and when it happens he gets defensive and a bit irritable. So when we were on a family vacation in another state, I didn't say a word when the speed limit sign indicated a change to 25 mph. Nor did our son, who also saw the sign and made the same decision, not to risk it. My husband was not happy when he was soon pulled over and cited for speeding.

If his error had been more egregious or endangering, I would have said something. My husband's a kind man, but what if he were ill-tempered and instead of an uncomfortable 30 minutes in the car there were really awful consequences? I would be less likely to speak up and a preventable accident, even a fatal one, might occur.

This is my primary concern with House Bill 22 and its prohibition of police officer distraction. It establishes the subjective opportunity for harsh consequences; so harsh and potentially life-altering that people will refrain from speaking up, even when doing so could save a life, even the life of a police officer.

Sometimes I've exclaimed, "Look out!" when I thought my husband was driving too close to another car, or I could see a car swerve into our lane. He usually has it all under control and does not appreciate my distracting outburst. But more than once an accident has been averted because someone with a different vantage point could see the danger.

Protestors and onlookers don't have the same vantage point as a police officer. I have no doubt those upholding the law wish others could see a situation through their eyes, with their knowledge and experience. On the other hand, another viewpoint or perspective can sometimes be exactly what's needed. Silencing all distracting voices may seem like a way to make communities safer and protect police officers. But in the long run, I believe it will have the opposite effect. Ohio already has laws in place to address the issues HB 22 and other proposed bills cover. It is my opinion that harsh punishments and the inclusion of vague language prohibiting police officer distraction will lead to a silencing of voices, including ones that need to be heard.