

**Testimony on House Bill 109**  
House Criminal Justice Committee  
June 22, 2021

Submitted by: Joanie Calem

Rep. Abrams, Rep. Carruthers and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to House Bill 109.

My name is Joanie Calem and I am a resident of Franklin County. I am extremely grateful that I had the good luck to be born in this country. I am appreciative of the American form of democracy that allows citizens to freely express their views, organize with other like-minded citizens in doing so, and gather in public to do so. Obviously, everyone who has benefitted from an American education knows that this was one of the main pillars of the foundation of this country, that, unlike under the monarchy in Great Britain where the founders had come from, here in the US citizens are not expected to always agree with rules and legislation that an elected government body has enacted, and citizens are free to voice their disagreement and gather to display that disagreement in public spaces. Citizens are also guaranteed the right to protest without being attacked by police officers whose salaries are paid for by the citizens themselves.

Ohio already has laws in place that define what constitutes peaceful protest. Thankfully, the current definitions are fair and reasonable. HB 109 is suggesting wording that would amend the current definitions and create laws that would infringe on Americans' civil liberties and right to protest. The suggested wording equates non-profit social action organizations that are organizing legal protests against events or legislature with terrorist organizations. This is a modern example of the royal tyranny that the founders of this country worked to avoid by allowing free speech and the right to gather in protest. These laws are in opposition to the US Constitution.

According to the current wording of HB 109, your bill seeks to increase penalties for certain assault, vandalism, and riot offenses, to allow peace officers to bring civil suits against persons participating in a riot, and to prohibit bias motivated intimidation of first responders.

While on the face of it this sounds reasonable, in reality, police officers currently are immune from accountability of their own actions, as our country witnesses the daily killing of unarmed citizens by American police. Allowing police officers to define what constitutes a riot and to bring civil suits against protesters will not serve the goal of truth and justice. The current bill is sufficient, this one is egregious. Please do not vote this wording into law.

Joanie Calem