

Chair LeRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the Criminal Justice Committee.

I am Kristen Beireis, resident of Springboro, Ohio, wife, Daughter, advocate for social justice, former business owner and non-profit program coordinator. I am speaking in opposition of HB 109.

I have participated in many peaceful rallies and marches in my time and I've been to Washington, D.C. to participate as well. I have also helped organize several peaceful rallies in the Dayton area. HB 109 would make all of this not only harder but of a much greater risk.

In the last 4 years alone I have participated in around 20 different peaceful protests. I have taken actions such as putting chalk on a sidewalk, marching in the street when the crowd got too big and I have blocked a sidewalk too. All of these would put me at risk for a felony conviction if HB 109 is passed.

Currently, I am searching for a full-time job. Almost every job I apply for asks if I have a felony conviction. If HB 109 were to be put into place, every time I want to go out to a rally or march, I would be risking losing any chance of a stable job working in a non-profit. I shouldn't have to choose between gainful employment and exercising my right to Free Speech.

Here's an example of how this might look. Let's say there's a rally happening on Sunday. As one of three Administrators of a Facebook group of civic minded individuals who share similar values, I promote this event which is in alignment on both our private group and our public facing page. These values are also in alignment with my congregation, so as one of the Administrators on that Facebook group, I share it out on that group too.

When I arrive at the rally on Sunday, it's looking like we have way more people than expected and we spill into a street because we no longer fit in the permitted space. My group gets pushed out onto the street and now we are arrested. With HB 109 in place, we would now be charged with a Felony. If someone not in my group decides that they will break a window, now my congregation and Facebook group could be sued for damages because the event was promoted out.

HB 109's provisions would be so much of a risk for me that instead of inspiring people to take part in the democratic process of my country, I would feel forced to be silent. Instead of participating in Free Speech activities to stand up for my values and the values of my faith community, staying home would feel like my only option. I have a Husband who is working part-time because of a health condition. I can't afford to not work or spend years in prison. However, there are injustices happening in our government that we, the people, need to speak out on and I need to do that too! HB 109 makes it a detriment to myself and others to exercise our First Amendment rights. I urge you to stop this bill now.