

Testimony on House Bill 22
Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:
Deborah Cooper

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 22.

Bystanders called to Officer Derek Chauvin, urging him—even yelling at him—to stop kneeling on George Floyd’s neck. Did they obstruct justice when they called on Derek Chauvin to behave in accordance with his own police training, to treat George Floyd as a real person deserving of respect and care while in custody?

Vaguely written House Bill 22 would increase penalties for merely distracting or yelling at or “diverting the attention” of a law enforcement officer. The assumption is that every law enforcement officer respects those citizens he has pledged – and has been trained – to serve and protect. Given the Floyd case, and the cases of too many other unarmed people brutalized by law enforcement officers, how can we reasonably make such an assumption?

According to House Bill 22, the bystanders at George Floyd’s murder could be found guilty of “obstruction of justice.” But justice was NOT served that day, and it was certainly not the bystanders who were guilty. Derek Chauvin was convicted of murder, and those bystanders were standing up for justice, not obstructing it.

Our Constitution guarantees freedom of speech for a reason. When citizens lose their power to speak out against injustice, injustice is allowed to prevail.

Passing a bill such as House Bill 22 would not only make Ohio less safe, but also less just. Democracy is messy, but life under a government that criminalizes dissent is intolerable.