

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Amanda Hays. I am an Ohio voter and I work as the Justice Coordinator at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus, Ohio. I strongly oppose both HB 22 and HB 109, which aim to end peaceful protest in Ohio.

The bottom line on House Bill 109 and House Bill 22 is that they are unconstitutional and un-American. These bills define felonies so broadly that peaceful, constitutional protesters can be arrested and charged with felonies at the whim of law enforcement. Under HB22, a thirteen-year-old teen joyfully joining in their first Pride celebration could be charged with a felony for accidentally throwing glitter in the direction of a police officer. Under HB 109, a seven-year-old child could be hit with high fines and a felony for creating sidewalk chalk art at a peaceful protest. And any faith groups or community groups that helped plan the protest could be hit with debilitating fines as well.

Honestly, these bills have made me wonder whether I am living in the “land of the free” or a dictatorship where the police have the power to take extreme measures against any protesters they choose. Our country, from its founding, has been defined by ordinary people taking a stand against injustice, whether that be taxation without representation, worker exploitation, or second-class citizenship based on race. Protest is in our bones. Freedom to protest makes America, America.

These bills are unconstitutional and un-American. The First Amendment states that we the people have the right to peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. These bills are an absurd attack on this freedom that as an American and an Ohioan, I hold so dear.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this UnAmerican bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.