

Chair LeRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the Criminal Justice Committee: My name is Lynn Buffington and I live in Beavercreek, near Dayton. I respectfully ask that you do not pass HB 109 out of committee.

In 2019, three blows struck the greater Dayton area. A white supremacy group from Indiana obtained a permit and gathered in a central public venue on May 25. There were the incredible and devastating 21 “Memorial Day” tornadoes on May 27 and 28. On August 4, in 32 seconds a misogynistic young man killed nine innocents in the Oregon District shooting before he was killed by Dayton police officers in an incredibly quick response. The community rallied to respond to all three of these events under the banner of “Dayton Strong.” I mention these because there were many large gatherings of the public associated with these events – peaceful protests against the white supremacists, many gatherings at points where water and food were distributed to tornado victims, and many vigils to honor and mourn those killed and wounded in the Oregon District shootings. I am gravely concerned about the consequences of HB 109, should it become law, to gatherings such as these and the people and organizations involved.

Many of these gatherings involved numerous organizations, from faith communities to civic groups such as the Oregon District Business Association. HB 109 would have the government threatening the existence and values of such groups due to concerns about fines and legal costs. HB 109 expands the definition of corrupt activity to include the provision of resources or material support used in the act of a riot. This could include providing water or sign making materials for large gatherings such as the Oregon Street shooting vigils in which 99% of the people were peaceful but in which a few people, on the outskirts of the gathering, caused a disturbance which would qualify as a “riot.” Many faith communities frequently struggle with finances and under HB 109 conscientious leaders would be compelled to prohibit encouraging participation in almost any public gathering, be it a peaceful vigil to mourn and honor the Oregon District victims or an humanitarian effort to distribute water and food to tornado victims. Ohioans do not want you, our legislators, to create an environment that is so fearful and threatening to civic organizations and faith communities.

Please do not pass HB 109 out of committee. Thank you.