

Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brown, Committee Members. I appreciate the opportunity to offer my testimony on HB 325, a bill regarding a political subdivision's emergency powers and the preservation of rights regarding firearms during an emergency.

My name is David Lima, a resident of Mentor, Ohio and a member of the leadership team, Showing Up for Racial Justice, Northeast Ohio Chapter.

HB 325, if passed, will have a chilling effect on peaceful protesting by creating unsafe space for those choosing to exercise their 1st Amendment right to assemble and petition their government for redress of grievances. I participate in peaceful protests and organizations like SURJ, UUJO and Our Voices Together, from time to time, sponsors and co-sponsors such events. This legislation would alter laws now in place that are designed as safeguards to protect all who choose to exercise their 1st Amendment rights. This legislation would remove those protections. This legislation, if enacted, would make us all less safe by removing the safety guardrails put into place by law. It would dampen and discourage participation in peaceful protests. Under these circumstances, the

safety of all, protestors, law enforcement, anti-protestors, provocateurs would be compromised.

Creating state law that prohibits the the exercise of local law enforcement judgment would be disastrous. Local law enforcement with their hands tied would be required to stand by while armed anti-protestors and provocateurs surround and intimidate. If government officials choose to act, based on their best judgment for the sake of safety, those officials could be sued for damages. The motto “To Serve and Protect” would be meaningless under these circumstances.

With protestors, anti-protestors, provocateurs, firearms, ammunition, ammunition-reloading equipment or deadly weapons, all in the same space poses a dangerous, unsafe and volatile situation. If there is anything that resembles violence or over-reaction by the protestors against those with weapons and those with weapons choose to use them, serious harm or death could occur. Those using the weapons would most likely feel emboldened knowing they would could claim a “stand your ground defense”. Ohio's welcoming message should not be, “Ohio: Find the 'Wild West' here”.

HB 325 is a dangerous piece of legislation. HB 325 makes us all

unsafe and threatens the 1st Amendment rights of peaceful protesters like me and sponsors of peaceful protests. I urge rejection of HB 325.