



House Government Oversight Committee
RE: House Bill 100
April 18, 2023

Opponent Testimony
Written Only

Elaine Schleiffer, co-founder, REACH NEO

To Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan, and members of the Government Oversight Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition of House Bill 100. My name is Elaine Schleiffer and I live on the west side of Cleveland. I am a member of Cleveland's Mental Health Residents Advisory Committee (MHRAC), a part of our consent decree work, and a co-founder of REACH: Responding with Empathy, Access, and Community Healing, Cuyahoga County's coalition advocating for the expansion of crisis services. In my work, I have one foot in the world of public safety, and one foot in the world of public health.

I am writing in opposition to this bill which would prohibit restrictions around the display of the "thin blue line flag." First, legislators have not weighed in on many other flags that are symbols of powerful cultural movements which should also be protected, such as the Trans Pride Flag. Second, the "thin blue line flag" is politically divisive to such an extent that violence surrounds it both in language use and in real life.

The "thin blue line flag" is a cloaked signal for white nationalist power. No amount of political rhetoric will change the way that fistfights, discrimination, hate and harm surround it as a symbol. In my neighborhood in Cleveland, a bar at the end of my block used to fly this flag, until multiple bar patrons were involved in a fight about it, and the bar realized it was creating an unsafe atmosphere for everyone.

A state-level approval of the "thin blue line flag" demonstrates that Ohio's legislators are more invested in the culture wars than they are in community safety.

Please, our communities are already divided; we are already straining to provide basic safety services and crisis response programming; communities like mine are already struggling to work against interpersonal and cultural violence. *Do not make these struggles worse.*

I ask you to vote NO on House Bill 100, to protect every member of our communities.

Thank you,

Elaine Schleiffer