Jack Daniels
State Representative

Josh Williams
State Representative

February 25th, 2026

Chairman Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity for Representative Daniels and I to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 457.

House Bill 457 is a deliberate and carefully constructed response to a troubling reality: the rise of politically motivated violence. It does not react emotionally. It responds structurally.

House Bill 457 provides that when a person commits aggravated murder if they purposely cause the death of another and the offender's motivation for the killing is based on political affiliation, association, belief, or ideology

The underlying act, purposefully causing death, has always been illegal. What this legislation recognizes is that when murder is carried out to silence political expression or retaliate against political identity, the harm radiates beyond the immediate victim. It strikes at civic participation itself.

The bill also explicitly includes the purposeful killing of an elected official within the aggravated murder statute. Ohio law already elevates certain murders, such as those involving law enforcement officers or first responders because of the broader societal impact. This bill applies the same structural logic to political violence.

House Bill 457 also incorporates political motivation into Ohio's sentencing factors. Courts will need to consider whether an offender was motivated by prejudice based on race, religion, elected or appointed position, political affiliation, political association, or biological sex. Political identity is added alongside long-recognized bias categories, ensuring coherence within our sentencing structure rather than creating an isolated or unprecedented enhancement.

The legislation also establishes mandatory prison terms and a specification process for politically motivated offenses of violence. These are not symbolic provisions. They require formal charging, proof beyond a reasonable doubt, and adherence to established criminal procedure.

We want to address directly, and unequivocally, the question of capital punishment. House Bill 457 is not a death penalty expansion.

Aggravated murder is already eligible for the death penalty under Ohio law. This bill does not create a new capital offense category. It does not broaden the range of punishments beyond those that already apply to aggravated murder. Instead, it clarifies that when a homicide is carried out when violence is weaponized to intimidate, suppress, or retaliate against civic engagement it fits within the existing aggravated murder framework

The penalty structure is unchanged. The definitional clarity is what this bill provides.

Just as importantly, this legislation is intentionally bipartisan. Political violence does not wear a partisan label. It does not belong to the right, and it does not belong to the left. In recent years, we have witnessed acts of violence and threats directed at conservatives, at liberals, at elected officials, at candidates, at activists, and at commentators across the ideological spectrum.

In a district like mine, one that is nearly evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats, I do not only represent people who voted for me. I represent neighbors. Families. Small business owners. Teachers. Veterans. Students. Every one of them deserves to participate in our democracy without fear.

This bill does not seek to inflame division. It seeks to restore confidence. It affirms that disagreement is not danger, that opposition is not the enemy, and that democracy depends on the free and safe exchange of ideas.

Our nation was not founded on uniformity of thought. It was founded on debate, often very fierce debate, but debate conducted without violence. Polarization and division are not new, but allowing violence to become a political tool would be a profound departure from our constitutional tradition.

House Bill 457 sends a clear and hopeful message: we will argue passionately, but we will protect one another's right to do so. We will defend the rule of law not selectively, but consistently. And we will ensure that political disagreement in Ohio is settled at the ballot box, not through intimidation.

For those reasons, we respectfully ask for your support and would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Sincerely,

Representative Jack K. Daniels
Ohio's 32nd House District