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Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 53 — Sponsor Testimony
Wednesday, February 19, 2025

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 53.

Senate Bill 53 will update the current law that requires offenders to pay for costs that result from riots and vandalism by adding a provision in civil law requiring them to fix or repair damages related to their actions.

This legislation will also create civil liability for those who provide material support to those convicted of vandalism, riot, and aggravated riot offenses. People who provide destructive materials, such as frozen water bottles or a pallet of bricks near a riot can be held accountable for their actions, too.

The bill also creates a new option for the court to use by forcing convicted offenders and/or material supporters to fix or repair property damage because of their actions related to vandalism, riot, and aggravated riot offenses.

There is also a provision in the bill that allows for the plaintiff to recover full compensatory damages, including damages for emotional distress and may recover courts costs and other associated fees related to the civil action.

There is a guardrail put in place for this provision stating that the convicted offender does not have to repair or replace damaged property or other damages if they have clear and convincing evidence that they did not personally cause the damage to the property.

This bill also declares that it is the intent of the General Assembly to encourage prosecution of vandalism, riot, and aggravated riot offenses.

It was reported by the Columbus Dispatch in August of 2020 that property damage from riots in Downtown Columbus alone totaled at least \$1.2 million. This affected at least 115 businesses, nonprofits, and state government offices. This sort of behavior should not be tolerated and should be prosecuted whenever possible.

Additionally, this legislation prohibits any government official from limiting or restricting the authority of police officers to take action to quell, arrest, or detain individuals involved in a riot or vandalism. Government officials should not be interfering with an officer's sworn oath to protect the public.

Over the past several years, we have seen how violence has taken a toll on communities and the damage riots have caused. We need to hold accountable those who act to harm or damage property and ensure that they are the ones paying for these actions, not the local taxpayers and businesses.

I want to make crystal clear that there is nothing in this bill that discourages or violates the First Amendment right to peacefully assemble and protest. This bill is simply designed to hold those who turn violent and destructive accountable for their actions and to deter these actions.

Thank you once again Chairman Manning and members of the committee for the opportunity to present this legislation to you today. I will be glad to answer any questions at this time.