

Dear Senator Eklund,

I am writing to express my serious concern with SB33 on two accounts: 1) the content of the bill poses a serious threat to free speech rights of Ohio citizens who wish to express their opposition or support for infrastructure projects in our state. 2) the process by which this bill is being fast tracked and limited in opportunity to express concern reflects disrespect for citizens free speech rights as well.

While I respect private property laws of this state, we as citizens, community members and homeowners also have private property rights that may be infringed by infrastructure developments. Our private property rights are not protected to this extreme, and now our rights to inquire via public hearings, and protest are being limited. The potential harm caused by trespassing and vandalism are already covered by existing laws and do not need to be multiplied and overloaded in this instance. If terrorism is involved, then those laws would apply.

Civil disobedience is a long-standing and historic practice in this country, beginning with the Boston Tea Party. The opportunity to disagree and protest government and private actions is part of what makes this country a democracy. Infrastructure is more than just private property. It is part of what protects and enhances our quality of life. If it does harm or has the potential to do so, we have a right to express our concerns. The marriage of private oil and gas interests with the escalation of attacks on citizens free speech rights raises the question of who really is running our government. Passage of SB33 can only escalate the distrust and suspicions citizens have about the loyalties of our representatives and their commitment to sustaining citizens democratic rights.

I live near a major railway line which can carry all sorts of toxic substances through areas where children play and neighbors plant gardens. My family enjoys Lake Erie as a recreational resource. Are these infrastructure elements also off limits to protest should they become a danger to my community?

I pray for the day our representatives return to concerning themselves with the rights and welfare of voting citizens and vulnerable populations in this state, rather than the business interests of campaign donors.

Sincerely and respectfully,

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