



Opponent Testimony - SB 185

March 8, 2022

Dear Chairman Wilkin, Vice-Chair White, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony in opposition to SB 185.

My name is Pastor Hank Osmundson, I am a resident of Delaware, Ohio, and I serve as the Executive Director of Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio (UUJO). I am dismayed and alarmed by the provisions of SB 185 and fear the deleterious impact its passage would have on the First Amendment rights of Free Speech and Free Assembly guaranteed to every Ohioan. That alone, I believe, is enough reason to oppose this bill.

The only thing that might be more American than baseball and apple pie is the right of the citizens of the United States to freely assemble and speak their minds. It is a sacred right and one that I am grateful to be able to exercise even at this moment as I type these words. It is the right to assembly and speech that allows millions of Americans like me to gather in churches, practice our faith, and then tell others about it. It allows me to encourage parishioners, colleagues, family, and friends to speak their minds or travel with me to the town square to hold signs or march in a parade. But what happens when those holding signs at the town square could find themselves face-to-face with others who are armed not just with opposing words, but also deadly weapons? I would surmise that the willingness of people to speak their minds openly, authentically, vulnerably, and freely would be severely hampered if they were faced with the threat of harm or death. Suddenly it becomes a tug of war between the rights of American citizens to assemble and speak and the right of other American citizens to demonstrate their opposition by holding their finger to the trigger of a gun.

I recognize that I am resorting to hyperbole to make a point, but the fact still remains: if people fear they risk physical harm or death as a result of exercising their rights to assembly and free speech, then those rights are clearly being curtailed. I cannot fathom how this bill would not result in the chilling of the exercise of assembly and speech. I am troubled by the possibility of people being harmed or killed because of ideological differences. I am troubled by the possibility of counter protestors carrying a weapon into an area where a protest is taking place and that law enforcement officials would not be able to prohibit those armed people from being there.

I am requesting that you please do not advance this bill. It is detrimental to democracy. It is detrimental to the exercise of free assembly and speech. It is detrimental to those who seek peaceful discourse and transformation. Again, I would like to express my gratitude for allowing me to submit testimony today. I ask that you encourage robust civic engagement in Ohio by voting to oppose SB 185.

Blessings & Hope,  
Pastor Hank Osmundson, M.Div.  
Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio