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Chairman Hoagland , Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Veterans and Public Safety Committee.

My name is Larry Bresler. I am the director of Organize! Ohio. We are an organization that works to promote, advance and assist grassroots community organizing as a strategy for change. We have participated in and assisted in the organizing of rallies, marches, and demonstrations. Every one of them has been non-violent and peaceful.

I am writing you today in opposition to SB 185 as a bill that would have a stifling effect on peaceful protests and rallies while creating an unnecessary safety environment. Under this legislation, groups holding peaceful events could be legally surrounded or intertwined by individuals or groups of individuals brandishing guns, explosives or other deadly weapons. Under this legislation the police would have no authority to prohibit or temporarily take away such weapons to avoid violent outcomes.

An example of the problem of this legislation is highlighted in the first part of the legislation.

The first part of the bill retains a section that allows the chief officer with police powers to cordon off an area when trying to suppress a riot (five or more people engaged in disorderly conduct). It adds to that section allowing the cordoning off a mob. A mob is defined in Ohio as a collection of people assembled for an unlawful purpose and intending to do damage or injury to anyone or pretending to exercise correctional power over other persons by violence and without authority of law.

However, the legislation specifically removes all wording that had been in that section previously that would prohibit the sale, dispensing or possessing of firearms, other dangerous weapons, explosives in, to or from the cordoned off area.

A group (it could be from the right or left side of the political spectrum) does a rally outside the Statehouse, where there are some people acting in an unruly manner that the police felt necessary to cordon off as a riot. Under this provision, there would be nothing to prevent people opposed to the protestors to surround the cordoned off protestors with guns and dynamite. Potentially worse, it would be legal for others outside the cordoned off area to hand over guns or dynamite over to the unruly protestors within the cordoned off area to cause mayhem within or outside the cordoned off area, without the authority for the police to confiscate the weapons.

This is a bill that will threaten the safety of people peacefully protesting, people nearby the protest who are not protesting and the police who are trying to keep order for all.

SB 185 needs to be defeated.

Thank you.

Larry Bresler

Larry Bresler
Executive Director