*Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members. My name is Heather Cantino. I reside in Athens. I speak on behalf of Buckeye Environmental Network, on whose board I serve, and Athens County Fracking Action Network Steering Committee, of which I am a member:*

Ohio Senate Bill 250, the anti-protest bill sponsored by Athens’ Senator Frank Hoagland is a dangerous assault on civil liberties and free speech. Trespass, already covered by Ohio law, is penalized by this bill with felony charges and high fines if the trespass is against so-called “critical infrastructure,” including corporate owned pipelines (even if they are on someone’s own property), corporate owned oil and gas wells, and Homeland Security sites (meaning protestors supporting immigrants are vulnerable). The legislation is clearly meant to intimidate individuals and, even more dangerously, non-profit organizations that organize people to speak out against assaults by oil and gas companies and their infrastructure against our communities, climate, and public health. Under the bill, organizations can be held liable for others’ actions through guilt by association, with ten times greater penalties than the penalties that individuals will receive. This can only be meant to silence and squelch environmental advocacy, so essential at this time of accelerating climate chaos.

We are especially outraged that this legislation is being proposed at a time when our planet is experiencing climate catastrophe brought about by corporate greed and government collusion. This is also at a time when the necessity defense is being successfully invoked in court to justify climate civil disobedience that brings urgent attention to the role of fossil fuels and government inaction in the climate crisis. It is these government and corporate activities that threaten and destroy lives and property, not the peaceful, brave and selfless actions of those who practice climate disobedience.

It is especially alarming that this legislation is being introduced as our federal government moves toward fascism, which will be greatly facilitated by such state actions. Fascism is when government works hand-in-hand with corporations to end democracy, free speech, free assembly, free press, and other constitutionally protected civil liberties. Also pertinent in Merriam-Webster’s definition is that fascism entails “severe economic and social regimentation and forcible suppression of opposition.” People are very alarmed at such behavior by our state’s elected officials.

The bill also stipulates that a person or organization who pays another person to cause damage to a critical infrastructure facility or “who pays the person's fines or damages in a civil action for damage caused to a critical infrastructure facility will be held vicariously liable for damage caused to a critical infrastructure facility (R.C. 2307.66(C).” This means that an individual or organization providing bail funds to support peaceful climate civil disobedience is subject to severe financial penalties and felony charges. This provision alone ought to make every elected official and the public oppose this insidious and terrifying proposal.

If you have not heard much opposition to this bill, it is only because it has barely been covered in the press and because this hearing was announced only late last week with little coverage in the media to date and a holiday weekend intervening, making it impossible for most people to be notified let alone submit testimony or attend. It is certainly *not* because the majority of Ohioans would favor such intimidation and unconstitutional squelching of free speech and peaceful assembly. Holding the only hearing for opponent testimony with such inadequate public notice on a matter of such extreme importance to our democracy and constitutional liberties is shameful. Further advancement of this legislation without full public notice and opportunities for public input would likewise be unconscionable.