

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brown, and Committee Members:

My name is Pastor Hank Osmundson. I am a resident of Delaware, Ohio and serve as the Executive Director of Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio (UUJO). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding HB 325.

I am urging you to vote against HB 325 primarily because it could have a negative effect on Ohioans who wish to exercise their First Amendment rights. The right to speak one's mind and the right to assemble are sacred, and they are at the heart of keeping the democratic principles of our nation vibrant and alive. While HB 325 does not directly affect First Amendment rights, I fear that it could serve to limit the willingness and ability of people to exercise them.

I am particularly alarmed and dismayed by the provision of HB 325 that, according to the Legislative Budget Office's analysis, would strike the following from Ohio law: "Prohibit the sale, offering for sale, dispensing, or transportation of firearms or other dangerous weapons, ammunition, dynamite, or other dangerous explosives in, to, or from the cordoned off areas." I cannot fathom how the ability to exercise First Amendment rights would not be curtailed or chilled if one who is protesting anything is aware that firearms and explosives could be legally offered for sale at the site of the protest.

The inability of those tasked with ensuring the safety of the public to prevent individuals from bringing, "lawfully" using, or even selling deadly weapons in a location in crisis would only serve to escalate the danger to everyone present, including those whose duty it is to protect the public. I fear that the passage of HB 325 could result in violent and deadly consequences that may not be the intent of its authors, cosponsors, or proponents.

The right to dissent, the right to free speech, and the right to assemble are all components of what make this country a place to be proud of and that, simply, are as American as America itself. I ask that you please reject HB 325 because it could open the door to restricting, even if indirectly, the sacred rights guaranteed to every American by the First Amendment.