

Testimony concerning SB 16
Michael Melampy
143 Westbridge
Berea, OH 44017

I want to express my opposition to the passage of SB 16 Title: Regards civil action by, and crimes against, first responders. This bill creates new penalties for persons engaging in actions that block public roads and sidewalks. If fewer than 4 persons are engaged in such actions, the offense is considered to be a misdemeanor. If more than 4 persons are involved, then the action is considered to be a "riot" and is classified as a felony offense. In many peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience, more than 4 persons are involved, which means that a felony charges could be sought against the protesters under the conditions of this bill. The threat of felony charges, whether intended to or not, will discourage many types of legitimate protest. There are already laws on the books to deal with cases in which individuals block public access or do not obey police orders; this bill is simply piling on with the intent to suppress protest.

The bill also creates felony penalties and civil liabilities for individuals and organizations involved in fundraising or other support for protesters. Again, the purpose seems clear: suppress protest. Given that many of our most important social justice advances (even the Constitution itself), have been achieved through protest and civil disobedience of unjust government actions, we cannot afford further suppression of legitimate protest if we want to maintain our democracy. While it may feel good to pass laws like SB 16 in the aftermath of the Capitol riot, we must guard against unnecessary restrictions on our ability to protest government missteps.

I urge you to vote against SB 16.