

Good Morning Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Teresa Mills, and I am testifying as a citizen of Ohio. I want to disclose that I do work for two non-profit organizations, one a statewide organization and the other a national organization.

As a citizen of Ohio, I as well as others in this room have the courage and audacity to believe that we really can change Ohio and have the right to say so.

As communities across Ohio struggle with environmental problems ranging from toxic contamination to assault by the extraction industry, it is essential that lawmakers maintain a safety net of robust laws, policies, and programs aimed at protecting our communities and environment as well as building a firm foundation by which to grow a thriving, sustainable economy. Not what you are proposing here today. SB 33 intent is to have a chilling effect on our constitutional rights to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of association.

Our safety net is growing weaker and weaker. Some threads have been cut altogether, while others have become thread bear and existing holes have been made larger and larger. The average Ohio citizen has a reduced ability to challenge or have a say in the decisions that affect their community and environment. They have less assurance that their health and their environment will be protected for them and for future generations. SB 33 will take away one of the last tools that citizens have to protect themselves, their families and their community. Sure you can say that SB 33 does not prevent protests or take away our freedom of speech or assembly, but that is just splitting hairs. The chilling effect of SB 33 will cause dead silence among Ohio citizens; I guess that is the point. To silence citizens.

Are you aware that in 2017 the United Nations (prior to the introduction of SB 250 and now SB 33) sent a communication to the United States stating their concerns about bills like Sb 33? In the report the Special Rapporteur states;

The Special Rapporteur on the rights to peaceful assembly and association has repeatedly stated that there is no such thing as a violent protest but there are violent protestors, which should be dealt with individually and appropriately by law enforcement. One person's decision to resort to violence does not strip other protesters of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly. This right is not a collective right; it is held by each person individually.....

The United Nationa Special Rapporteur report further states:

1. General observations

The Bills were mainly proposed at the beginning of 2017 and exclusively by Republican legislators. Given the current context in the United States, where several protests have erupted in

the past few years, starting with the general movement led by Black Lives Matter and the recent protests arising after the presidential elections, we are concerned that the proposed legislation, by increasingly criminalizing peaceful protests, is designed to discourage the development of that movement.

If enacted, the Bills would highly curtail the rights to freedom of opinion and peaceful assembly in ways that are incompatible with US obligations under international human rights law, in particular articles 19 and 21 of the ICCPR, as well as the First Amendment of the American Constitution.

The Bills would have a chilling effect on protestors, stripping the voice of the most marginalized, who often find in the right to assemble the only alternative to express their opinions. We are particularly concerned about the fact that several Bills directly target environmental activists. Senate Bill No. 17-035 in Colorado, House Bill No. 1383, Senate Bill No. 2246, as well as other proposed state Bills in North Dakota, and House Bill No. 1123 in Oklahoma would dramatically increase penalties over protests held in the vicinity of environmentally sensitive areas. As mentioned above, these Bills were reportedly proposed as a response to the protests organized by activists and opponents of the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

Ohio citizens are being disempowered. The ability of citizens and organization to positively influence community protections in Ohio has been reduced. In this era with most business and governments claiming their commitment to sustainability and environmental protection, public reporting of businesses that are breaking laws is an important incentive to remain within the law and that is lacking in Ohio.

I encourage you to table this bill and not vote it out of committee.

Thank you