

Chairman Bacon and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Roxanne Groff and I live in rural Athens County and wish to present opponent testimony to **SB 250**. I am a former Athens County Commissioner and Bern Township Trustee, holding office as an elected official for 20 years. Thank you for your time and attention to this very important legislation before you today.

Senate Bill 250 is unnecessary, overreaching, intimidating, and unconstitutional in its attempt to suppress the rights of citizens in the name of protections for corporations and the newly created critical infrastructure named in this bill. Political speech is the most protected and revered of our rights under the first amendment. Clearly this bill is designed to chill and suppress these rights. This bill if enacted cannot and will not survive judicial review. Current Ohio law covers penalties for criminal mischief or criminal trespass regardless of the facility or owner of property and applies penalties commensurate with the act.

This bill was created to impose fear upon citizens who have become increasingly aware and vocal about the threats to their health, and their wellbeing as a result of the oil and gas industries' assault on the land and people of this state by extraction of oil and gas, injection of toxic radioactive waste from this extraction and the infrastructure build outs of pipelines and gas compressor stations.....almost all of which are located in the Appalachian region.

Because our lawmakers will not listen to the voices and pleas from their constituents about the harmful effects on families and our earth and only look at data generated by computer models that reveal so called positive economic benefits from the oil and gas industry in our state, people are protesting in streets, the statehouse, the courthouses and at infrastructure sights as the only way they can demonstrate the frustration at the lack of oversight to this assault on our communities. Protests are the one way to educate the public as to the harms the oil and gas industry imposes upon unsuspecting communities. To take away our freedom of speech and right to assemble through the intimidation tactics of this bill is oppressive, dangerous and violates the time-honored practice of publicly speaking out against perceived injustices and urging action, a form of assembly and thus protected by the Constitution.

Vague language such as “(7) Without privilege to do so, knowingly destroy or improperly tamper with a critical infrastructure facility, or otherwise knowingly impede or inhibit the facility's operations or its construction” leaves far too much interpretation to a facility owner to press criminal charges against an individual or group who may protest its operations in their community. As the terms “impair” and “impede” are not defined in the bill, their existence will likely deter citizens from constitutionally protected acts of protest out of a justified fear of doing years of hard time in prison for violating these broad terms.

The very idea of making “organizations” criminals by their support and association of concerned citizens is outrageous! Where do citizens turn when their lawmakers ignore them and dismiss the egregious effects of this monster industry or industries for which people and communities have no protections? They turn to organizations that have information, who ARE willing to help organize and inform people on their rights and how to fight back against a government who will not listen or help.

Senate Bill 250 is a bad bill! The people of Ohio know it, protest it and expect their elected lawmakers to reject it.