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CONTACT

Michelle Fernandez-Miranda
Office of Representative Kevin Chambliss
Michelle.Fernandez@myfloridahouse.gov
305-333-3553

Representative Chambliss Issues Statement on HB 1

Homestead, FL –Representative Kevin Chambliss (D- Homestead) has been in communication with constituents and members of the community about their concerns with the HB 1 Combating Public Disorder.

Representative Kevin Chambliss issued the following statement:

“Protesting is a foundational part of American history; it is how our government was formed, and it is how people have continued to hold our government accountable for protecting our civil liberties. And yet, amid a pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, HB1 is a bill that over criminalizes peaceful protesters in Florida.

HB1 was proposed in the wake of the overwhelmingly peaceful protests calling for accountability after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and too many others who have suffered from state violence and police brutality. Instead of being sensitive to the voices of the community, who wish to use their constitutional right to peacefully assemble against inequality, legislators here in Tallahassee have made it their top priority to attack our First Amendment right to free speech and assembly.

The protection of our fundamental rights and freedoms is something that all Americans hold near and dear to their hearts, but there is another portion of this legislation that concerns me even more. Included in the proposed legislation is a provision to remove liability for those who commit violence against protestors, such as people who drive their cars into peaceful protesters. This is the scariest piece of legislation that I have seen in my life. Imagine this, your 19-year-old college student is participating in a peaceful protest of a business. She and other students are gathered on the sidewalk, but the number of students soon begins to grow at an unexpected rate. Therefore some students are forced off the sidewalk onto the street....

Now the next scene seems incomprehensible, right. No one would ever have thought that this young lady and her friends would have just put their lives in danger while exercising their first amendment rights. At the beginning of 2020, we would have all thought that someone, acting in the extreme, and using their vehicle to run over and hurt that little girl would have been completely out of the realm of possibility....

Well, it's not the beginning of 2020. This is 2021. We now know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this is possible. Not in theory, but we have witnessed it in action and it is horrifying.

According to news reports, between May and September of 2020 alone, there were over 100 incidents of bad actors driving cars into protestors. Six of those incidents happened here in Florida: in Gainesville, Tallahassee, Pensacola, Daytona Beach, and twice in Tampa. It is clear that our peaceful protestors are in of need protection, not criminalization.

Permitting people to commit acts of violence against peaceful protestors, with such limitations on due process, will lead to targeting of people protesting for social change. This is a fact that has already been proven. This is a scene that any parent, Democrat or Republican, should fear. And this is a portion of this bill, that every Floridian, should seek to change.

I have worked on this, tirelessly, with the help of others. I have had a chance to speak to the Sponsor, directly. And I am hopeful, that in the spirit of compromise, goodwill, and the wellbeing of our children, this portion of the bill will be made to no longer exist. As always, God Bless you, and God Bless our children.”

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