

June 9, 2020

Governor Mike Dewine
77 S. High Street, 30th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Director Dr. Amy Acton
Ohio Department of Health

Re: The indiscriminate use of tear gas on peaceful protesters and the immediate and long-term health effects

Dear Governor DeWine and Director Dr. Amy Acton,

During the past week, tear gas, pepper spray and mace have all been used by police against peaceful protestors in Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, Dayton and Akron. We are extremely concerned about the use of tear gas and other chemical agents, which are banned under the Geneva Protocol, on the general population and the dangerous impact these agents may have on public health.

We thereby urge you to immediately end the use of tear gas on the citizens of Ohio and prohibit the use of tear gas by all county, municipal and township police departments indefinitely for the following reasons:

1) *Tear gas may have dangerous health effects on Ohioans.*

Tear gas can cause physical injury, permanent disability, and even death.¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control, “long-lasting exposure or exposure to a large dose of riot control agent (tear gas), especially in a closed setting, may cause severe effects such as the following: blindness, glaucoma (a serious eye condition that can lead to blindness), immediate death due to severe chemical burns to the throat and lungs, or respiratory failure possibly resulting in death.”²

Additionally, several studies indicate the risk of miscarriage for pregnant women exposed to tear gas.³ In 2012, seven women in Bahrain reported having had miscarriages after being repeatedly exposed to tear gas.⁴ Similar increases in miscarriages were reported after the use of chemical agents during the Arab Spring and Chilean protests in 2011.⁵

¹ Haar, Rohini. *Lethal in Disguise: The Health Consequences of Crowd-Control Weapons*. Rep. Ed. Cara Zwibel, Anne Suci, Karim Ennarah, Luciana Pol, and Lucila Santos. N.p.: International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations, n.d. Print.

² <https://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/riotcontrol/factsheet.asp>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5096012/>

⁴ <https://www.thenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Bahrain-TearGas-Aug2012-small.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-tear-gas-works-a-rundown-of-the-chemicals-used-on-crowds/>

The state should not allow the indiscriminate use of a possible abortifacient on Ohioans.

2) The use of tear gas violates civil and human rights.

We have witnessed the use of tear gas by law enforcement to be excessive, indiscriminate, and in violation of civil and human rights. The use of tear gas is not only irresponsible, it is un-American. The unjustified use of a dangerous chemical weapon on protesters raises serious human rights concerns under international law.

Furthermore, data shows violent police response disproportionately affects communities of color.⁶ Police equipped with military style weapons can cause past trauma to be reopened. During the George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Aubery protests, protesters showed up with anti-racism signs to peacefully protest, but interactions between police and protesters escalated without justification. Meanwhile, during the “Reopen Ohio” protests, protesters were armed with semi-automatic weapons, racist and anti-Semitic paraphernalia and other weapons of war, yet there was zero response from law enforcement.

3) The use of tear gas may exacerbate the spread of COVID-19.

Finally, there have been heightened concerns that the use of tear gas, pepper spray and mace will increase the spread of COVID-19. These chemical agents can cause uncontrollable eye-watering, nasal and sinus discharge, coughing, vomiting— all of which would increase the spread of water droplets, the main way in which COVID-19 spreads.

Some studies also show possible long-term health effects, especially on the lungs, among those exposed to these chemical agents.⁷ There is a danger that those exposed to tear gas will be at higher risk of deadly symptoms of COVID-19, a disease that attacks the lungs. Thus, the use of tear gas is even more dangerous during this ongoing pandemic.

Respectfully, Governor DeWine, we can't imagine that Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Amy Acton has not already brought forth concerns around the usage of tear gas. We thereby implore you to ban the use of tear gas by the Ohio National Guard and all county, municipal and township police departments to protect the health and safety of all Ohioans.

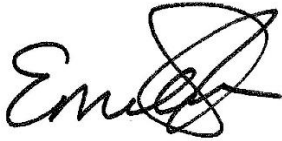
⁶ Fryer, R. (2019). *An Empirical Analysis of Racial Differences in Police Use of Force*. Journal of Political Economy

⁷ <http://cidbimena.desastres.hn/pdf/eng/doc8080/doc8080-contenido.pdf>

Yours in Service,



Janine Boyd
Ranking, House Health Committee
House District 09



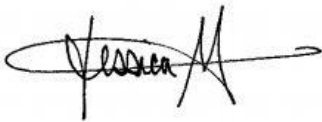
Emilia Sykes
Minority Leader
House District 34



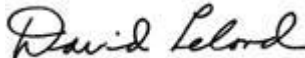
Kristin Boggs
Assistant Minority Leader
House District 18



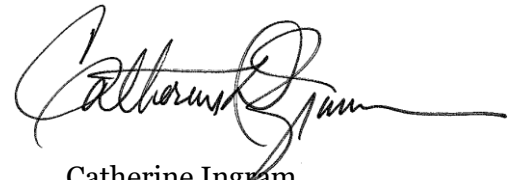
Richard Brown
Assistant Minority Whip
House District 20



Jessica Miranda
House District 28



David Leland
House District 22



Catherine Ingram
House District 32



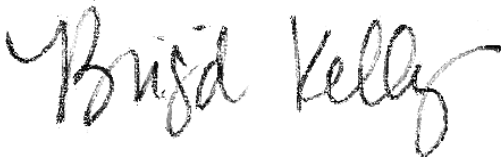
Lisa Sobecki
House District 45



Juanita Brent
House District 12



Dr. Beth Liston
House District 21



Brigid Kelly
House District 31



Michelle Lepore-Hagan
House District 58



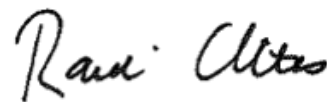
Erica Crawley
House District 26



Kent Smith
House District 08



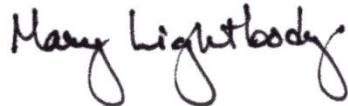
Casey Weinstein
House District 37



Randi Clites
House District 75



Gil Blair
House District 63



Mary Lightbody
House District 19



Stephanie Howse
House District 11



Terrence Upchurch
House District 10



Allison Russo
House District 24



Tavia Galonski
House District 35

CC:

Thomas Strickrath, Director, Ohio Department of Public Safety

Dave Yost, Ohio Attorney General

Rep. Emilia Sykes, Leader, House Democratic Caucus

Rep. Stephanie Howse, President, Ohio Legislative Black Caucus