

Mollie Kennedy, Community Outreach Director
4615 Public Hearing Remarks

Good morning. My name is Mollie Kennedy and I am the Community Outreach Director at the ACLU of West Virginia.

In my work, I am blessed to work with West Virginians all across this state; to hear their stories and learn what matters to them. Many of them wish they could be here this morning speaking to you about their strong opposition to this bill, so I would like to share some thoughts on their behalf.

In this country, we have a long proud history of protest, and of nonviolent civil disobedience. When in 1942, Min Yasui broke the curfew law placed on people of Japanese ancestry and was jailed for walking up and down the streets of downtown Portland past 8 pm. When 15-year-old Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks refused to move on their bus for a white man, they gave strength to a revolution. Or when just down the road, local clergy in their collars were arrested and led away in handcuffs over their protest of harmful changes to our healthcare system.

When our neighbors in Kentucky formed a blockade of train tracks in protest of their employer's sudden decision to declare bankruptcy, leaving miners with their paychecks bouncing, one miner said, "I'm not really comfortable with it, but I gotta do what I gotta do." Throughout history, there are plenty of examples of people gathering together in nonviolent civil disobedience, not because they sought to be radical troublemakers, but because they felt a responsibility to 'do what they had to do' for themselves, their families, and their communities.

These groups and these individuals who slept in tents and lost their livelihoods and were locked in jail cells; I would ask you - should they have paid more, suffered more for their willingness to stand up to injustice?

These people needed to be heard, and they took bold, meaningful action - often at great cost to themselves and their families - to make sure an injustice was made right. From lunch counter sit-ins to suffrage, to occupations and tree sits in our beautiful natural lands, to the Underground Railroad, nonviolent civil disobedience has changed the course of history for the better. Those who participate in nonviolent civil disobedience know the risk and they do it anyway because their pursuit of fairness and justice and safe communities are more important to them. To levy harsher fines and penalties on some of the most marginalized and voiceless when they are peacefully and nonviolently speaking up for what they believe in is wrong. It's unamerican and it chills and silences what history has proven to be meaningful acts that move us in the direction of what is right and just.

I hope you will vote no on House Bill 4615. Thank you.