

Disability Community Opposes SB 24

Dear Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

In the coming days, you will be charged with reviewing and voting on **Arkansas Senate Bill 24 (SB 24)**, better known as "Stand Your Ground" legislation. As you prepare for this responsibility, you will hear from many Arkansans and groups representing Arkansans concerned about the danger SB 24 poses to specific populations in our state, including Black Arkansans and law enforcement. There is a substantial amount of research, data, and case evidence to suggest that **SB 24** would create a more dangerous environment for each of these groups and others.

Passage of SB 24 presents a significant threat to the safety and wellbeing of Arkansans with disabilities and the people who support them. As representatives of the disability community in Arkansas, we ask you to consider the following as you make a decision about the vote you will cast on **SB 24**:

- Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Autism, communication disabilities, physical disabilities, neurological disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities often communicate and engage in social interactions that are frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted by people who are not familiar with them. Without a legal duty to retreat, misinterpretations and misunderstandings of these engagements pose a major threat to the safety and wellbeing of individuals with disabilities.
- In 2006, **Joseph Erin Hamley**, an Arkansas man with Cerebral Palsy was shot and killed by law enforcement officers when the physical limitations of his disability caused his movements to be perceived as threatening gestures and an imminent threat.
- In 2013, **Ethan Saylor**, a Maryland man with Down Syndrome was killed by law enforcement when he refused to leave a movie theater at the end of his movie and resisted aggressively as his support provider warned that he would.
- In 2016, **Charles Kinsey**, a Florida Direct Support Professional supporting an individual with Autism to deescalate during a crisis situation was shot by law enforcement officers when his interaction with the person he supported was misinterpreted as a threat.
- In all three situations, skilled law enforcement officers, trained in assessing imminent danger, were unable to accurately interpret the interactions of people with disabilities resulting in serious injury and death. *The expectation that unskilled and untrained citizens will be able to better assess a perceived threat and make a decision to use lethal force in similar situations without the obligation to retreat when they can safely do so is problematic and **dangerous for people with disabilities and the people who support them.***

*As Arkansans with disabilities, family members of Arkansans with disabilities, disability provider agencies, and disability advocates, we are deeply concerned about the serious consequences the passage of SB 24 would have on the entire disability community in Arkansas. We ask that you consider the safety and wellbeing of all Arkansans with disabilities and the Arkansans who them as you cast your vote on Arkansas' "Stand Your Ground" legislation and **vote "NO" on SB 24.***

Respectfully,