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On the “Combatting Violence, Disorder, and Looting and Law Enforcement Protection Act”

On September 21st, 2020, Governor Ron DeSantis proposed an act called the “Combatting Violence, Disorder, and Looting and Law Enforcement Protection Act.” The acts were proposed in response to the recent protests going around the country, specifically the Black Lives Matter movement. DeSantis’s reasoning for establishing these new acts was that although American’s have the right to assembly, protesting has gotten too out of hand with “professional agitators, bent on sowing disorder and causing mayhem in our cities.” However, the percentage of violent protests compared to peaceful protests is incredibly small. These acts are only being put in place out of fear of losing control. By being put in place, these laws will only lead to a lack of safety and protections for protesters in Florida.

In Summer of 2020, The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project calculated that out of more than 10,600 protests, 95% of them were involved in peaceful protesting. Most of these protests were connected to either Black Lives Matter or the current handling of the pandemic. Around 93% of protests tied to Black Lives Matter have been peaceful, and the extent of the violence is significantly lower than what the media has been portraying it as. Often the violence that is being thought of is confined to a specific block rather than the entire protest, such as has been the case in Portland.

Media bias also has a play in giving viewers the wrong idea about the protests.

Nevertheless, the “Combatting Violence” act in response is a huge risk to the foundation of the basic rights of Americans.

With these guidelines, protesting is not an option unless you are willing to risk arrest and punishment. For example, being involved in a protest where someone is "disorderly" can get someone a third-degree felony, even if one does not participate in said disorder. RICO liability is at risk for anyone who supports through funds or helps organize. If one works for the government and participates, state benefits are terminated and they are ineligible for employment in state government. The Prohibition on Obstructing Roadways law punishes protestors for protesting in the streets. By limiting protests off the streets, it limits the protestors from gaining the attention they need from who or what they are protesting. The obstruction law also includes another guideline where if put in place, drivers will not be responsible for injury or death of a protestor if they are obstructing traffic. This is a blatant attempt to silence protestors, and forcing their silence with risk chance of violence, arrest, and death.

These punishments and vague guidelines proposed are in no way for the benefit of the people, but for the powerful. Incarceration is being used as a tool to silence the public rather than protect them, and with these measures put in place the basic rights listed in our Constitution are being disregarded when it is not of the benefit of those in power. This must not be ignored and must not be allowed to pass.