



Trayvon Martin's Mother Calls For An End To "Stand Your Ground" Laws

"Laws and practices that make it easier for one person to kill another with impunity betray the morality of the American people," said Sybrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin.

By: Marissa Higdon – October 29, 2013

Sybrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, urged U.S. Senators on Tuesday to change "Stand Your Ground" laws to better protect people like her son, who was killed in 2012.

"If "Stand Your Ground" is causing more unnecessary deaths and enabling people to get away with murder, it should be fixed," she said during a hearing held by the Senate Judiciary Committee panel on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights. "Laws and practices that make it easier for one person to kill another with impunity betray the morality of the American people."

Martin was shot and killed during a struggle with neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman, who claimed self-defense. After a lengthy trial earlier this summer, Zimmerman was acquitted of second-degree murder charges.

Lucia McBath, the mother of Jordan Davis, a teenager shot and killed last November, also encouraged federal lawmakers to address "Stand Your Ground" laws, which are present in some form in 46 states. The laws allow individuals to use deadly force to defend themselves without requiring them to first retreat.

"This law declares open season on anyone we don't trust for reasons we don't even have to understand," said McBath. "Stand Your Ground defies all reason. It goes against the sound system of justice established long ago."

The mothers' testimony was supported by Criminal Justice Institute Director Ronald Sullivan, who said "Stand Your Ground" laws unfairly target minorities and encourage citizens to act as vigilantes.

"We do not live in the wild wild west any longer," he said. "We should leave it to trained police forces to deal with [crime]."

Ilya Shapiro, a Senior Fellow in Constitutional Studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, disagreed. He argued that such laws are misinterpreted by victims. "These laws aren't a license to be a vigilante," he said.

Crime Prevention Research Center President John Lott echoed Shapiro, arguing that the laws simply help those who must defend themselves. Lott added that he thinks that the laws have benefitted minorities.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), the subcommittee's top Republican member, called self defense a "bedrock liberty for every American." Cruz accused U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder of not making the prosecution of violent crime a top priority.

The conservative lawmaker said that opponents of "Stand Your Ground" are trying to "exploit a tragic violent incident" in an effort to inflame racial tensions and undermine the power of juries.