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We often hear that the First Amendment has never been stronger. I'd like to tell you a story about why that's not true.

It starts with a guy in East Cleveland who supported the "wrong" mayoral candidate. So law enforcement destroyed his livelihood & prosecuted him for his words.

In August 2021, around **eight** cops descended on William Fambrough's home. His alleged crime: a parking violation.

Or so they said. But Fambrough's involves serious transgressions—carried out by the government, not Fambrough. Fambrough, who is 74, has lived in East Cleveland for years. He's never had any problems. Until he started using his sound truck to promote a challenger to East Cleveland Mayor Brandon King.

Which is when cops took an interest in him.

Police repeatedly harassed him at his home. They said he was violating an obscure law that prohibits people from parking trucks on residential streets. (Yes, really.)

So they towed & destroyed the vehicle he used to campaign against the incumbent mayor.

That ordinance? It's never used. Public records dating back to 2016 show the police didn't enforce it **once**.

And the real kicker: The same day they towed & destroyed Fambrough's truck, there was another van conspicuously violating the same law. The cops did nothing. <https://t.co/5tjBmZBXFF>



Police also filed criminal charges against him for noise pollution to punish him for using his van to broadcast endorsements for the mayoral challenger.

Except Fambrough had a permit to do that very thing...signed by the Chief of the East Cleveland Police Department. Here's where it gets more outrageous, if that's possible. The prosecutor outlined Fambrough's transgressions: He "made complaints about the police" and filed "public records requests."

The only way to come to a peaceful resolution, she said, was for him to "stand down."

There's just one huge problem: None of those things are remotely criminal.

They are the epitome of First Amendment-protected speech, allowing citizens to hold the government accountable without fear of reprisal for doing just that. And yet someone was made a criminal bc of it.

This is not an isolated instance.

Here's another recent example: A Louisiana man was arrested for violating "14:00000"—a crime that doesn't exist—after police grew furious that he had criticized their failure to solve a local murder. OK.

<https://reason.com/2022/05/23/police-arrested-him-for-criticizing-the-cops-qualified-immunity-st-tammany-parish-louisiana>

Even more absurd: East Cleveland's police dept is very short-staffed. And they dedicated 8 (!) cops to...destroying the car of someone they didn't like.

It's the state's job to protect people from people who violate their rights. East Cleveland is busy doing the violating.

But this isn't just about East Cleveland. Free speech rights mean absolutely nothing if the government can leverage petty laws & direct them against someone simply because the state doesn't like them.

If it can happen to him, it can happen to you.

<https://reason.com/2022/06/13/he-was-targeted-by-police-for-his-political-speech-now-hes-suing>