



THE COACH HALL FOUNDATION

For The Protection Of Our School Children

Substitute House Bill 318 Proponent Testimony 2018

Chairman Smith, Vice-Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and distinguished members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on Substitute House Bill 318, legislation that would establish basic qualifications and training requirements of school resource officers. My name is Tim Armelli. I am a teacher and coach at Chardon High School. I have been an educator for 39 years and have taught and coached at Chardon High School for the last 21 years.

As background, Chardon and Chardon High School are located about 30 miles east of Cleveland. Chardon is a small, very picturesque city with a population of about 5,200 citizens, located in Geauga County, and is situated in the heart of Ohio's "snowbelt" and home to the Geauga Maple Syrup Festival. Geauga County boasts the 2nd highest per capita income in Ohio, and Chardon is also the county seat of Geauga County. Two years ago, our school district celebrated its 200th anniversary, and had achieved a string of 11 consecutive years of an "Excellent" rating from the state.

Unfortunately, Chardon also holds the unenviable position as the location of Ohio's worst school shooting in the state's history. On February 27, 2012, a student gunman opened fire in Chardon High School's cafeteria, at approximately 7:35 am, shooting six students. Three of the students died as a result of their wounds, and one student remains paralyzed. I had left the cafeteria just seconds before the shooting started and called on the PA system for the school to "lock down" moments after the shooting began. Coach Frank Hall, unarmed, chased the gunman from the building saving countless lives. It is a moment in time that changed my life, our students and staff's lives, and our community forever.

It is because of that horrific event that the Coach Hall Foundation, of which I am a part, will continue to assist communities to find ways to protect our school children. Substitute House Bill 318, I believe, is a necessity in moving to this end and providing Ohio's children with the protection they deserve.

It is my belief and the belief of all of us with the Coach Hall Foundation that School Resource Officers are a necessity in our schools. Our children have a right to an education, and our parents and community have a right to believe our children will return to their homes and families every day. We must do a better job of protecting our children. We have an expectation that our children are being educated by licensed teachers, that our schools are maintained by certified electricians, plumbers and other professionals. Our transportation drivers have specific training and license endorsements. We must also have equally high expectations and standards for the men and women we put in the position of School Resource Officer. Throughout Ohio there currently exists confusion and inconsistency in the term and training of School Resource Officers. Local school officials can use the term School Resource Officer as they see fit. They can determine what training, if any, a School Resource Officer needs. We need to set a standard by which the people in our buildings, with the task of protecting our children's lives, are held to a high standard of moral, ethical, and legal responsibility. Substitute House Bill 318 defines the qualifications and duties of a School Resource Officer. As a supporter of Substitute House Bill 318, I believe we are setting a consistent standard and identifying very consistent training for School Resource officers in our

schools. It is critical that the position of School Resource officer adhere to the highest level of education and training. The term School Resource Officer and the position can be misused or abused if standards are not applied.

School Resource Officers will protect our young people's lives, become positive role models, and mentor the students in our schools. School Resource Officers should be trained in the mental and emotional development of school children, how to present material in class, and learn non-confrontational de-escalation techniques. School Resource Officers can be a valuable asset to students, teachers, and administrators as well. School Resource Officers can become an integral part of the development of our youth within our school communities. Working together with our school leaders, School Resource Officers can be a very positive influence in our schools.

It is our ultimate goal to have a School Resource Officer in every school, but before we can get to that discussion, a consistent definition of a School Resource Officer and uniform training to become a School Resource Officer is mandatory.

Nationally, more than 30 states do not have any laws regarding School Resource Officers. Many that do have laws do not define the requirements to be a School Resource Officer or how they are trained. Ohio must take the lead to provide the nation with a blueprint and framework of the School Resource Officer. We are very fortunate to have one of the best, if not the best, training programs for School Resource Officers in the country. The training is provided by the Ohio School Resource Officer Association.

Lastly, monies attached to the bill by way of the bill's amendment as school safety grants will give schools opportunities to add additional layers of protection for our children. Mental Health training, school safety training, safety equipment, and communication equipment will provide schools with many of these layers of protection. The opportunity to be able to take more proactive steps in our school will increase the quality of life within our schools and save lives.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I encourage you to support this important legislation for our state and its children. I am glad to answer any questions the committee may have.

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