

**House Education and Career Readiness Committee**  
**Proponent Testimony, House Bill 318**  
**Tony Baker, Sandy Hook Promise**  
**February 27, 2018**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Ohio House of Representatives, thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Sandy Hook Promise on House Bill 318 and support this bill's passage through your committee.

My name is Tony Baker, and I am the Ohio State Director for Sandy Hook Promise. Sandy Hook Promise is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization led by several family members whose loved ones were killed in the tragic mass shooting at Sandy Hook School on December 14, 2012. Our mission is to prevent gun violence and other forms of violence before it happens by educating and mobilizing parents, school and communities on mental health and wellness programs that identify, intervene, and help at-risk individuals. In Ohio alone, Sandy Hook Promise has delivered over 950 in-school Know the Signs prevention programs in nearly all of Ohio's 88 counties, training over 600,000 student and adults – at no-cost to schools. School resources officers are a terrific partner in our ability to administer our *Know the Signs* violence prevention programs in Ohio schools. With our mission and partnerships with school resources officers in mind, we support this sub version of House Bill 318, and thank Representative Sarah LaTourette and Representative John Patterson for their work.

In the most recent sub version, this bill would narrow the scope of the definition of a school resource officer to include only peace officers appointed through a memo of understanding between a law enforcement agency and a school district. This sub version adds important instruction on “understanding the appropriate role of school resource officers regarding discipline and reducing the number of referrals to juvenile court” and “specifies that the school district or school administrator has final decision-making authority regarding all matters of school discipline.” These improvements will help close school-to-prison pipelines and avoid zero-tolerance type enforcement.

In our no-cost Safety Assessment and Intervention training, a threat assessment program, we teach school resource officers and school administrators a problem-solving approach to prevent violence; address problems such as bullying before they escalate; reduce use of school suspension; and improve student trust in staff. Many of the provisions included in this bill, such as training to develop “appropriate communication techniques which enhance interactions between the school resource officer and students” will aid school districts to have a problem-solving approach to treat the whole child if they decide to hire school resource officers.

We support the inclusion of a ‘requirement for coordinated crisis planning and updating of school crisis plans’ in the contents of a memorandum of understanding. This is an appropriate role for a school resource officer to work with a school district or the school administrator. It is our strong recommendation that the school crisis plans include a robust emphasis on prevention planning and strategies and not just on determining roles during a response and in the recovery stage. Sandy Hook Promise has worked with school resource officers, such as Officer Marty Eberhart of Barberton High School, to support a sustainable prevention strategy. Each school year, Officer Eberhart schedules a

Sandy Hook Promise Presenter to train the entire high school student body in both our Say Something and Start with Hello programs. Earlier this month, Officer Eberhart worked with his team of school resource officers to ensure all school buildings in Barberton City Schools trained their students in Start with Hello. School resource officers, like Officer Eberhart, ensure their district deploys sustainable prevention trainings freeing up school administrators to focus on other needs.

We also applaud allowing students an opportunity to provide input during the drafting process of a memorandum of understanding. We teach students through our Start with Hello and Say Something programs that their school is their community – that they have an ability and a responsibility to improve the school's climate and to take immediate action when they see or hear something that may be harmful to a fellow classmate or to the school. Allowing students a voice in the local MOU will not only empower them, but improve the relationship with school resource officers so that students view them as a trusted adult.

Chairman Brenner and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you again for providing Sandy Hook Promise the opportunity to share our views on the sub version of HB 318. Sandy Hook Promise commends the work that has gone into developing this bill. School resource officers play an important role in many schools, improving the ability to respond when the need arises, and training students in prevention - to know the signs and report warning signs before a tragedy occurs. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.