



**Representative John M. Rogers**  
**60<sup>th</sup> House District**

**Education and Career Readiness Committee**  
**Sponsor Testimony on HB 544**  
**May 15<sup>th</sup> 2018**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee. Thank you for allowing Rep. Perales and myself the opportunity today to offer testimony for House Bill 544, legislation that prescribes standards for school safety enhancements in new Ohio school facilities.

All of us are aware of the dangerous and often tragic situations that have arisen due to shootings in our schools. A younger sister of mine was attending Wickliffe Schools when a shooting occurred at the Middle School in November of 1994. A man entered the school building, shot and killed the custodian, shot and seriously injured both a teacher and an administrator, and exchanged gunfire with a responding Wickliffe Police Officer who was critically injured during the exchange. The Officer's intervening actions disabled the perpetrator, ending any opportunity to cause further harm.

The same sister, years later, while teaching in a Cleveland area school, twice encountered students who had come to school carrying a handgun. On one occasion, she expressed that not only did she find herself in an uncomfortably precarious situation because of the gun-toting student sitting next to her, but being adjacent to someone who is the focus of a responding SWAT Team with tactical weaponry aimed in her direction was equally as unpleasant to say the least.

As a former Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, I was involved in the prosecution of a teenage student who carried and discharged a weapon in his school's hallway - twice. Fortunately, no one hurt in that incident. And of course the school shooting in nearby Chardon, left students, families and a close knit community forever devastated by the indiscriminate targeting, injuring and killing of innocent children. Unfortunately, this list continues to grow nationwide.

The legislation that we are asking you to consider is very simple. While not a complete answer to addressing a very serious issue, it is but one measure that we believe, if implemented, could enhance the overall safety and well-being of students and staff in some of our schools. This bill would take advantage of the critical junction that presents itself when a district designs and constructs a new school building. Quite simply, by requiring that safety features be incorporated into the design of a building before construction begins, these features would be much more affordable as opposed to the expense of remodeling and or retrofitting.

The essence of this legislation is to require that all newly constructed school buildings include a minimum of two of the following safety features:

- surveillance video, and/or
- entry way metal detectors, and/or
- direct entrance and exit routes located within a classroom, which may only be accessed from inside that classroom, and/or
- two-way communication systems between classroom and administrative offices, and/or
- real-time notification devices accessible in classrooms, such as a “panic button”, to directly alert local law enforcement agencies, and/or
- a means of threat containment, which could include a barrier system to lock down portions of the building wherein a threat has been identified.

I have spoken with the School Facilities planning commission about the State’s existing requirements. They have advised that while they offer 32 recommendations with respect to school safety issues, the commission does not have any mandatory requirements. Of note is that this issue is not addressed anywhere in Ohio’s Revised Code. Discussing this legislation with an architect that designs school buildings, he advised that he is unaware of any local zoning or building codes that require a school district to include specific safety requirements.

Our hope is that as a result of this legislation, all school systems will take a proactive approach with respect to safety beyond existing practices when designing and building any new buildings. Schools maintain discretion over what features to include and would be encouraged to include more, if they so choose. This legislation would ensure that a minimum standard is met.

Again, we ask that you carefully consider this legislation and we welcome your support. We are open to any questions you may have.