

June 5, 2018

Re. Interested Party Testimony re HB 318- Define qualifications and duties of school resource officers

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on HB 318. I am here today representing the Ohio Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, which represents the social work profession, and the nearly 30,000 licensed social workers in the state of Ohio.

We appreciate that the committee has taken up this very important question of how to support and train school staff to keep Ohio's kids safe. We support the efforts of HB 318 to clarify and standardize the role of school resource officers in school districts across Ohio and we are pleased with the emphasis on mental health awareness training. We do have some concerns about the current \$10 million funding and would like to present a case for funding a more broad, preventative view of school safety.

We do not need to accept school violence as a given. With support and evidence-based prevention, we can create school systems capable of intervening before there is any need for law enforcement. The U.S. public school system has the potential to act as a social safety net for students and families. When a student has a problem at home that presents in school such as hunger or abuse, schools can advocate on behalf of the student and work with the families to find a solution. School support staff like counselors and social workers are also uniquely able to intervene with violence or potentially violent behavior such as bullying and relationship violence. De-escalation and crisis management are foundational and universal within the social work profession.

Both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Secret Service have studied school shootings and recommended that the most effective way to prevent them is to put in place systems and supports to identify youth who are struggling and connect them to the resources they need. When funded and staffed adequately, school nurses, psychologists, counselors, and teachers, and school social workers are well-positioned support and redirect the students before violence escalates to require law enforcement. These professionals are already trained in mental health assessment and care, in individual and group interventions, and evidence-based prevention methods. In Ohio, school social workers must have a specialized school social work degree and maintain a license with the Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board. The licensure process offers a level of accountability and oversight that ensures ethical and competent practice.

We know that having more school social workers can prevent violence in schools but in recent years we have learned that multiple school districts that are laying off school social workers and reducing other support staff. Not every district has school social workers, and in those that do, we hear that one school social workers must often cover four or five different schools giving them a caseload of one social worker to several hundred students. School social workers are often the only support staff person trained and willing to make home visits to better engage families in the care and support of students who need extra attention. We worry that with funding narrowly directed toward law enforcement interventions, the unmet needs of students will continue to grow, and the violence and danger will continue unchecked.

We do not need to accept school violence as a new normal. I encourage this committee to support a broader, prevention-focused approach to school safety that support the needs and well-being of students well-before the threat of violence. I would be happy to take any questions you have.