



OH Safety And Violence Education for Students (SAVE Students) Act Hearing Testimony

Submitted by Mark Barden, Managing Director of Sandy Hook Promise

I would like to begin by thanking Chairman Blessing, Vice Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Robinson and all members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 123, the Safety And Violence Education for Students (SAVE Students) Act.

My name is Mark Barden, and I am one of the founders and Managing Directors of Sandy Hook Promise. I am also father to James, Natalie, and Daniel. On December 14, 2012 my youngest son, my sweet little Daniel, was murdered in his first-grade classroom at Sandy Hook Elementary school. The pain my family has endured every day since Daniel was taken from us is impossible to fully convey to you.

In the weeks and months following the shooting, I began working with other family members whose loved ones were killed that day to find a way to prevent other parents from experiencing the senseless, horrific death of their child to gun violence. In 2013, we embarked on a journey of comprehensive research to understand the causes and enablers of gun violence and to identify real solutions. We started by conducting qualitative and quantitative analysis to better understand the drivers of gun violence and all violence. We met with experts and academics like Marshall Ganz at Harvard, medical professionals, law enforcement, gunowners and groups, clergy, educators, parents, students and stakeholders of all kinds to help us better understand how we could have a sustainable, positive impact on reducing gun violence and foster a culture of safer, more connected schools and communities.

The result was Sandy Hook Promise, an organization that is committed to preventing gun violence before it happens with no-cost, evidence-based prevention programs in schools that train students and adults to know the signs of violence and intervene to prevent tragedies. To date, we have trained over 6.5 million youth and adults and have averted multiple school shooting, suicide, and other violent threats across all 50 states.

I am here today because OH has a special place in the history of Sandy Hook Promise. It was the first state we introduced our Know the Signs programming—holding our first Say Something week in the state back in November 2014. Since then, we've delivered our life-saving programs to over 1 million youth and adults across Ohio. This year, we launched a partnership with the Department of Education to bring our safety assessment and intervention program statewide so that all of the state's schools have access to threat assessment training with the help of a federal STOP school violence grant.



Based on our work here, we know Ohio is already a leader in school safety. HB 123 would make Ohio the first in the nation to establish a statewide standard for school and student safety programming by giving all middle and high school students access to life-saving trainings.

Under this legislation, the Department of Education would develop a menu of approved, evidence-based programs that schools can select from to deliver critical programming on suicide and violence prevention, as well as social inclusion. Importantly, each of these areas of training must include at least one no-cost option for schools so that money is never a barrier to saving a life.

We know that 80% of school shooters and 70% of people who die by suicide tell someone of their plans or give some type of warning or indication prior to the event. The SAVE Students Act, HB 123, will make sure all middle and high school students in Ohio know how to identify, intervene, and help at-risk individuals by teaching them the signs and signals of interpersonal violence and suicide and how to reach out for help.

Additionally, the legislation would establish a statewide anonymous reporting system to collect tips and information about potential threats to the safety of Ohio's students. This system would include a mobile app, giving students an easy way to report what they are seeing and hearing both in person and online. The bill also would require each school to identify and train a multidisciplinary team in an evidence-based threat assessment program so that they are prepared to respond to threats appropriately and get students the help they need to avert a crisis or tragedy.

We know these kinds of trainings and tools have the power to protect our students and save lives. We see it in our work every day across the country and right here in Ohio.

I truly appreciate the committee's consideration of the SAVE Students Act today and look forward to working with you on this life-saving legislation.

Thank you for your time.