

Testimony on Senate Bill 317
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Submitted by: Robin Hawkins

Chair William P Coley II and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 317. I am a concerned former teacher, mother of four including an active duty police sergeant, and the grandmother of five Ohio children whose parents are working to keep their children safe during the Covid-19 pandemic. I am also a volunteer with Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, a nonpartisan grassroots organization with nearly six million supporters. We support the Second Amendment and work to prevent gun violence through gun safety education and by advocating for common-sense gun safety reforms.

In addition to the Second Amendment, I support responsible gun ownership which should ALWAYS include training and proficiency in safe storage and usage. I oppose this bill because it will make Ohio school children, teachers, school workers, any law enforcement who are called to the school, as well as any and all those who visit Ohio schools, less safe.

This bill imagines that teachers and school personnel can somehow magically transform into competent, armed protectors of children and is a false and dangerous pretense at making schools safe.

1. Current law rightly requires that armed teachers undergo the same safety training that is expected of law enforcement officers, or have served 20 years or more in a law enforcement capacity. I do not want anyone without this minimal baseline training to have a weapon at a school.
2. Even in a situation where a teacher has the appropriate live-shooting training, this presumes that the individual has the mental/emotional ability to adequately assess and safely engage as an armed defender and can shift their focus and role, without harming those they are attempting to protect. No research supports this ridiculous idea and those who serve in the military dispute it.
3. The presence of a firearm introduces all its own potential tragedies as any loaded weapon could be inadvertently discharged (this has happened even with law enforcement officers) or even more likely, stolen.
4. The teacher is now at risk of being a target themselves if and when law enforcement does arrive on the scene of a potential crisis and is confronted by an unknown armed individual. This is already happening in other places who have armed guards (like bars) who are mistakenly shot by police responding to emergency calls.

The training necessary to adequately prepare for an armed confrontation where hundreds of innocent lives are at stake is not a one-time event. My son and every police officer must demonstrate proficiency with his firearm 4 times/year and they are required to participate successfully in ongoing scenario training to protect the public in a variety of “active shooter situations” so that the officers can practice and learn how to best protect bystanders. This

practice is necessary even for seasoned officers as it presents them with multiple simulated life-threatening encounters and the often negative and unanticipated consequences of action choices without endangering anyone. This remote preparation helps them remain calm and to act appropriately in real crises.

We expect our teachers to become knowledgeable experts in their field and to maintain their expertise with ongoing education. Expecting them to put on body armor and become SWAT team ready would be ridiculous if it were not so frightening.

I am not relying on my own thoughts and feelings for this assessment. The President and Executive Director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, which represents 75 police forces from large cities in the USA and Canada, both agree that arming teachers is “not a good idea” and say, “The more guns that are coming into the equation, the more volatility and the more risk there is of somebody getting hurt.”¹ Some insurance companies that cover schools have agreed with this assessment, either by making the dangerous practice of arming teachers appropriately expensive or by refusing to insure a school that allows it.²

There is plenty of evidence-based research on how to make schools safer and arming teachers is not only not on the list but makes schools less safe.

To make schools safer, research shows we must adopt an evidence-based intervention plan like the one proposed by Everytown, The American Federation of Teachers, and The National Education Association. These plans focus on intervening BEFORE potential situations develop by keeping guns out of the hands of children, teens, and adults whose mental state or criminal status should preclude their access to firearms. Extreme risk laws, responsible firearm storage laws that prevent unauthorized access, raising the age to purchase semiautomatic firearms to 21, and requiring background checks on ALL gun sales are all demonstrated ways to help prevent gun violence. Additionally, there are evidence-based and expert-endorsed actions that schools can take to intervene and address warning signs of violence and to keep shooters out of schools by establishing threat assessment programs, implementing basic security upgrades like access control measures and interior door locks, emergency planning that facilitates communication among school personnel and with law enforcement, and promoting more equitable schools.³

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify. Especially now while all of us are considering how to best provide a safe education for all our children, it is vitally important for our elected officials to lead the way with solutions that are evidence-based and carefully considered. Removing the protection current law provides schools is irresponsible and reckless. Please do not allow this to happen.

Respectfully submitted,
Robin Hawkins

¹ Patterson BE. America's police chiefs call BS on arming teachers. Mother Jones. March 8, 2018. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/03/policechiefs-call-bullshit-on-armingteachers-sandy-hook-parklandcolumbine/>

² Hiltzik M. One big problem with the idea of arming teachers: insurance companies won't play along, and for good reason. Los Angeles Times. February 26, 2018. <https://lat.ms/2BkRxBb>

³ <https://everytownresearch.org/arming-teachers-introduces-new-risks-into-schools/>