

Testimony against SB317
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Sen. William Coley, Chair

Submitted by: Lauren Squires

My name is Lauren Squires, and I live in Columbus in the University District. I am a professor at The Ohio State University; I am a commissioner on the University Area Commission; and I am a mother to two young children, one of whom will be entering kindergarten in Columbus City Schools this year. As a parent, a community advocate, an educator, and a resident of Ohio, I am urging you to reject the dangerous SB317—a bill that is being pushed by the gun lobby, and that is I believe against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of everyday Ohioans.

This bill would allow teachers to carry loaded guns in Ohio elementary, middle, and high schools without completing the safety training required by current Ohio law. This means that in my son's elementary school, teachers with barely any training could be carrying deadly weapons in a building full of young children. I don't know very many parents who would be comfortable with this scenario, or who would think that this kind of arming is an appropriate response to whatever safety concerns there might be. I don't know very many parents who think that more guns, held by more people with less training, can possibly create a safer environment for our children. In fact, data show that having more guns in schools increases the risk of gun violence.

Some of you may be aware, but here in Columbus, we are on track to have an especially deadly and injurious year of gun violence. Even more tragically, many of these victims have been children. This summer alone: A 15-year-old pregnant girl was shot while walking down the street; she survived but her baby died. A 5-year-old girl was hit by gunfire while laying in bed; luckily, she is stable. A 2-year-old boy was shot and killed in his home. A 4-year-old was grazed by a bullet. A 14-year-old boy was shot and killed while riding a scooter in his neighborhood. A 16-year-old was shot in the leg. A 14-year-old was shot in the buttock. A 12-year-old and 1-year-old were injured in a vehicle hit by gunfire. A 16- and 17-year-old were shot at in their vehicle and both suffered gunshot wounds. And there are more. I follow these stories because I care about the people in my community, and because some of the recent shootings have occurred in and very near to my own neighborhood. It has been a heartbreaking, devastating year.

I ask you: Do we really want to create conditions to allow for even more shootings—whether intentional or accidental—where children are the targets, or are caught in the crossfire? I can say unequivocally that I do not. Schools should be safe places, and for many students, they are one of the few safe places they have access to. I hope that, when you think of our children and keeping them safe, you also agree that filling schools with more deadly weapons carried by people with less training will not do that.

Finally, as a teacher, I wish to echo the concerns raised by the Council on American-Islamic Relations in their July 21 testimony regarding the Islamophobia and racism present in the FASTER training program, which, under this law, would be an acceptable form of training for

school staff wishing to carry firearms in school. As the CAIR testimony argued, “Associating Muslims with violence in the manner FASTER does creates a toxic and dangerous environment for Muslim students that may lead to increased racial profiling and disciplinary action against them, and even death.” The fact that both trainers and teachers who have been exposed to this widely-used training do not seem to have recognized such depictions as problematic and dangerous is deeply unsettling to me, as it should be to you, and raises a further red flag about the gun lobby group that offers the training and is pushing this bill.

Thank you for your time. Please reject SB317.