

Testimony on Senate Bill 317
Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Submitted by:
Deborah Cooper

Chair Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to SB 317.

I am an Ohio resident and voter and a former teacher who has taught at all levels from kindergarten through 12th grade, as both a full-time and a substitute teacher.

Not only can I not imagine how arming teachers would make students safer, but I'm shocked that Ohio legislators would even consider a bill like SB 317, which would drastically reduce safety training requirements for teachers who carry loaded handguns inside elementary, middle and high schools.

Under current Ohio law, all armed school employees—including teachers, security guards, and special police—must either complete an approved basic peace officer training course, or have completed 20 years of active duty as a peace officer.

SB 317 would exempt teachers from this requirement, allowing school districts to employ armed personnel in schools with as few as eight hours of concealed carry training (six of which can be completed online)—or with no training at all, if firearms are not concealed when carried.

My son is a special education teacher who has recently moved back to Ohio from California, and his children are elementary students. I do not want my son to teach in any school that allows teachers to be armed (particularly without training or with inadequate training), nor do I want my grandchildren to attend such a school. I certainly would not teach in a school district that put such a low premium on student and staff safety.

Teachers understand that kids of all ages are impulsive and frequently do not consider the consequences of their actions. A teacher would need many more than one pair of eyes to monitor everything that happens in a classroom on a good day. What if a student gains access to a teacher's gun? And how can parents be sure that an untrained teacher, making a split-second decision, won't shoot one of their children by mistake?

Young people depend on adults to exercise restraint and wisdom. When adults fail to consider the ramifications of the decisions they make, children suffer. We are currently traumatizing children with “shooter drills” while ignoring the elephant in the room – the greater likelihood that the shooter will not be an outsider, but rather a student, or even a teacher, who reacts impulsively out of fear or simply fires a weapon by accident. To ignore such real possibilities is irresponsible.

The only thing worse than arming teachers is to arm them without adequate training, as SB 317 would do.

For the sake of Ohio students and teachers, I urge you to vote no on SB 317.

Deborah Cooper