

Testimony on Senate Bill 317  
Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Submitted by:  
Trudi Marrapodi

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.

As an Ohio resident, voter, and licensed school psychologist, I am writing to you in opposition to SB317.

SB317 would allow teachers to carry loaded guns in Ohio elementary, middle, and high schools without completing the safety training required by current Ohio law. It would allow school districts to employ armed personnel in schools with as little as 8 hours of concealed carry training, or with no training at all, if they do not conceal their firearm. This is a recipe for disaster.

I am a member of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). NASP strongly opposes arming teachers as a strategy for preventing gun violence on school grounds. Arming school staff places an unrealistic, unreasonable burden on America's educators, has the potential to cause more harm from unintentional or inaccurate discharge of firearms, and can undermine the sense of safe, supportive learning environments.

Strategies known to help decrease violent behaviors in schools include improved access to mental health services, effective threat assessment practices, properly trained school crisis response teams, and creating welcoming, inclusive school communities for all students. These are evidence-based strategies that can prevent school shootings altogether.

NASP, along with the National Association of School Resource Officers, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the American School Counselor Association, and the School Social Work Association of America, have released "A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools," outlining the core components of school safety. This includes improving access to school-employed mental health professionals like school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers, who serve on the frontlines of meeting students' mental health needs and provide threat assessments for students at risk of

harming themselves or others. Additionally, we need improved coordination and collaboration between school staff, community mental health providers, law enforcement, and other first responders to close gaps in response to at-risk students and ensure they receive the interventions and supports they need.

NASP also strongly believes that possession of a firearm should be limited only to commissioned, trained school resource officers. Like other law enforcement agencies, the National Association of School Resource Officers has clearly articulated in their most recent statement the hazards associated with individuals possessing firearms who lack extensive law enforcement training and the sworn authority to enforce public safety. Among these risks are that an individual with a gun but not a uniform could be mistaken for the shooter; that firearm skills degrade quickly and require constant practice under high stress conditions; that being able to shoot a gun does not mean an individual is psychologically equipped to shoot another person; and that discharging a firearm in a crowded school setting is extremely risky.

NASP recognizes that more effective gun laws are critical to reducing gun violence. We need laws and policies that keep guns out of the hands of those who would hurt themselves or others and limit access to weapons intended to cause mass destruction in a short amount of time.

Our nation must focus on the approaches that genuinely safeguard the well-being of our children and the school staff who work to educate, empower, and protect them every day. Putting more guns in schools is not one of those approaches.

Research indicates that despite the enormous amount of media attention devoted to school shootings, they are still extraordinarily rare. In the meantime, our country is reopening its schools in the midst of a pandemic that has claimed the lives of more than 4,000 Ohioans. In this COVID-19 crisis, the personal protective equipment Ohio teachers and all school personnel need to know how to use is face coverings, shields and gloves--not guns. The training they need to most effectively protect students is in use of technology that supports their ability to teach at a distance. It is much more urgently needed than training in how to shoot a firearm.

I urge the committee to vote against SB317. Thank you.

Trudi Marrapodi