

Kavita Parikh 8/28/2020 Co-Leader of Students Demand Action Toledo

To begin, I would first like to thank Chairman Coley and the honorable Senators for taking the time to read this testimony against SB317. Taking the opinions of constituents into consideration reminds us all that our democracy is truly for, and by, the people.

Just over one year ago, nine people were killed in a mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio. Upon hearing the news that such a tragedy occurred only hours from my hometown of Toledo, Ohio, I decided it was time for me to take action and stand up for what I believe in: common sense gun reform. I co-founded Students Demand Action Toledo to unite with other student activists across our state in the movement to end gun violence.

As the coronavirus pandemic spreads and kills across our nation and the globe, another epidemic persists, that of gun violence in America. For me and my fellow students, returning to school is sure to be a stressful experience, but one that we will take in stride because we have all missed the routine of learning that we used to take for granted. However, there is no need for any added stressors to contribute to this situation. In a world where active shooter drills have become the norm for students as young as five years old, undoubtedly causing increased levels of anxiety and stress in a classroom environment, and during a global pandemic, **reducing safety training for armed teachers would only complicate and worsen the circumstances.**

It is first important to note that the very notion of arming teachers has been met with harsh criticism across the board. Teachers, themselves, through the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association oppose arming teachers¹, as does the National Association of School Psychologists². According to a recent survey, 63% of parents of K-12 students, the guardians of the very children the school must protect, are also against this practice¹. If the majority of parents do not support it, why do we allow teachers to carry firearms?

Current Ohio law already allows for armed school employees, contingent on a basic peace officer training course. **Senate Bill 317 would remove this requirement, allowing teachers and other school personnel to be armed with minimal safety training.** In opposition to arming teachers, the National Association of School Resource Officers notes that without proper training and regular shooting practice under high-stress simulations, such practices could lead to tragedy³. Even members of the New York City Police Department, some of the most highly trained law enforcement officers in the nation, see their accuracy in shooting decreases significantly in a gunfight¹: how would a teacher, especially one that lacks basic training, be able to shoot accurately under the pressures of an active shooter situation? The average police officer completes 168 hours of weapons, use-of-force, and self-defense training¹. By eliminating all training requirements, **Senate Bill 317 is endangering our students, teachers, law enforcement, and all other personnel.**

In addition, access to guns increases the risk of gun violence, tripling the risk of death by suicide and doubling the risk of death by homicide¹. There have already been several incidents of guns being misplaced, left in bathrooms, locker rooms, or the like, and ending up in the hands of students¹. Even with precautions limiting child access, the risk of unintentional or intentional shootings rises as teachers are armed, from a janitor who intentionally killed colleagues in Florida to accidental discharging of firearms by teachers¹. As the research shows, availability of firearms only leads to increased risk.

Additional research has suggested that arming teachers leads to a negative culture of fear for students, especially students of color. As students of color are disproportionately disciplined, an armed presence in schools has also been connected to decreasing high school graduation and college enrollment¹, for these students. The goal of our education system is to support and help students grow to their full potential: the presence of guns in the hands of their educators will only lead to increased stress and lowered academic achievement. **As a high school student myself, I know that I would never feel comfortable in a classroom where a firearm is present, especially if my teacher had not received the proper training beforehand.**

Instead of this dangerous and impractical approach to school safety, Ohio should lead the way to a safer future by focusing on proven methods to prevent gun violence. By enacting common-sense gun laws, including HB134 (an Extreme Risk Protection Order bill) and HB183, which would require background checks on all gun sales, Ohio would work on this public health emergency that is the gun violence epidemic at its core. Instead of pursuing reactionary procedures, these laws would reduce the amount of firearms in the hands of those who are at risk of harming themselves or others and protect Ohioans without ever relying on a frightened, inexperienced teacher armed with a gun. **For these reasons, I strongly encourage you to vote against Senate Bill 317.**

¹Everytown for Gun Safety. Keeping our kids safe at school: a plan to stop mass shootings and end gun violence in American schools.

<https://everytownresearch.org/report/a-plan-for-preventing-mass-shootings-and-ending-all-gun-violence-in-american-schools/#arming-teachers-is-dangerous>. February 2019. ²National Association of School Psychologists. NASP Opposes Arming

Teachers. <https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/media-room/press-releases/nasp-opposes-arming-teachers#:~:text=Bethesda%2C%20MD%E2%80%94The%20National%20>

Association,gun%20violence%20on%20school%20grounds.&text=NASP%20also%20strongly%20believes%20that,commissioned%20trained%20school%20resource%20officers. Published February 2018. ³National Association of School Resource

Officers. NASRO opposes arming teachers. <https://www.nasro.org/news/2018/02/22/news-releases/nasro-opposes-arming-teachers/>. Published February 2018.