

Testimony of Senate Bill 317

Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Submitted by:

Ann Morahan

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 SB317.

I am a retired teacher with 37 years of experience, knowledgeable about the social, emotional, intellectual and, yes, the physical and security needs of children, the limitations of adults with deadly weapons in spite of any inadequate training that might be offered by any agency, and the liability that comes with the presence of weapons in spite of the most noble of intentions by those, like you, with no experience in schools and learners with a multitude of needs.

I strongly oppose this bill. This proposed legislation is not only deeply flawed in its design, but it is also dangerous to the purposes of the state in providing a thorough and efficient system of education by deflecting the real needs of schools.

1) In my previous testimony, I stated that SB 317 should be opposed for the following reasons: The Ohio legislature, in spite of five Supreme Court directives since the original DeRolph decision in 1997, has consistently underfunded education in Ohio. How is it that in defiance of that ruling to provide a thorough and efficient system of education, the legislature still has not provided a clear method of adequately funding schools as they are presently constituted but imagines that resources will be made available to train teachers and provide weapons and ammunition when technology and learning materials are not adequately funded? Diverting money away from the classroom and teacher training in order to provide weapons training and possibly even weapons and ammunition is insanity.

2) Remember the 5 of 8 rule several years ago that was deliberated in the legislature, where the state allowed school districts to choose staffing between library/media specialists, art teachers, music teachers, counselors, psychologists and nurses? Does this proposed legislation mean that districts might in the future need to choose staff development choices for weapons instruction in lieu, let us say, of school nurses during a pandemic, of counselors during a time of national trauma and family strife, or of any other non-classroom specialist to support more armament in the schools while state and national legislators abrogate their responsibility for putting in place reasonable gun control?

3) How does SB317 comport with Senator Peggy Lehner's observation that counselors and psychiatrists need to be in place to address the needs of kids for help and guidance during these times of global pandemic and national – and domestic strife as evidenced in more family abuse?

4) Every troubled youth and adult that might bring a weapon to school represents a failure by a nation and its schools to provide an early warning of mental and emotional needs of its citizens. It is past time to have 5 of 8 type rules and instead fully fund counseling and health needs of children rather than provide funds for weapons training.

5) If you expect a decrease in violence in our society and a decrease in school shootings and mass murder by trouble individuals, you must decrease the inventory of weapons available. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control has long advocated this approach, and it is disingenuous for this legislature to talk about weapons training and arming teachers when you have failed to prevent the proliferation of and access to weapons whose only purpose is to kill, and not provide for personal defense.

As a long-time resident of this state, I am quite aware of the strong opposition expressed at the July 31 hearing. Just one month ago, I was concerned about this awful bill getting this far. Now, knowing that it is proceeding, I and my professional colleagues are outraged at this travesty offered as a "solution" to a problem.

In listening to previous testimony, I discovered a Medusa of many heads, two being power and money. I learned from several witnesses that this insane bill was devised to undermine a lawsuit against the Madison Local School district. The board members, influenced by the Buckeye Firearms Association, took it upon themselves to allow the teachers of the district to carry and use guns after 26 hours of training. It is my further understanding that police in Ohio are required to have a minimum of 700 hours of weapons training.

Remember the term “90 Day Wonders” that was used to describe the training of military officers? Today, this legislature is looking at 26 hours of training as one model for new teacher “professional development” training.

This is insanity. How can you sit there and allow insanity to become the norm?

Arming teachers and bringing more guns to school is not the answer. The C.D.C. states that we must decrease the inventory of weapons to decrease violence. If we have Resource Officers, why do we need to arm teachers? Even if there are Resource Officers, the combination of mentally unstable persons and guns is explosive.

I spoke to several teachers who stated unanimously that they have more hats to wear now and don't need another one. Besides preparing lessons, teaching, assessing students' needs, teachers are expected to act as nurses, social workers, parents, psychologists, psychiatrists, and more.

They neither are nor want to be policing with guns. Ridiculous. And what about the liability question? Where is the discussion about any limitation of liability? What about insurance coverage? Who is expected to pay for that?

Yes, you are attempting to normalize the absurd.

In the words of DaShanne Stokes, “When a country with less than five percent of the world's population has nearly half of the world's privately owned guns and makes up nearly a third of the world's mass shootings, it's time to stop saying guns make us safer.”

No, guns don't make us any safer, nor does insane legislation that is irresponsible yet puts even more responsibility on teachers to be all things.

The Germans say it best: enough is too much. Enough already!