



**House Criminal Justice Committee
Opponent Testimony HB 99
Presented by Melissa Cropper
President, Ohio Federation of Teachers
April 15, 2021**

Chair LaRe, Vice-Chair Swearingen, and Ranking member Leland and members of the Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). OFT represents teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses, higher education staff and faculty, and public employees. We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on HB 99.

OFT opposes HB 99 because we do not support arming teachers or staff. Sandy Hook teachers who suffered extreme trauma from a school shooting made recommendations after that tragic event to prevent the next Sandy Hook, never said arm teachers. Fully and fairly funding our public schools would allow rural school districts to hire appropriately trained School Resource Officers. Help us pass HB 1 so that schools can have the money to improve school security responsibly. The lack of any standards for training or transparency in HB 99 will make our schools less safe than they are today.

While we oppose the premise of HB 99, some commonsense provisions would mitigate the risks from this legislation. If HB 99 moves forward, we urge you to include these minimum standards.

- **Transparency:** Parents should know if teachers or staff carry firearms in their child's school. Teachers and staff should know if their colleagues are carrying guns. This notification should not detail which staff are carrying firearms, so that an active shooter does not target them.
- **Oversight:** The legislation should direct Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy (OPOTA) to develop the training curriculum and length. They have the expertise needed to ensure that armed teachers and staff can properly evaluate and de-escalate situations rather than shooting first and asking questions later.
- **Psychological testing:** This commonsense safeguard would help parents, teachers, and staff have confidence in this program.

In contrast, HB 99 currently has no minimum standards. The requirement of a concealed carry license, which would be required regardless of HB 99, is a minuscule eight hour training, six hours of which can be done online. There are no transparency standards, which means that parents, teachers, and staff could be completely unaware of concealed firearms in their schools. Instead of a training program developed by OPOTA, school districts rely on organizations without peace officer training expertise, like Buckeye Firearms Foundation's so-called "FASTER Saves Lives" (FSL) program. We have some concerns about this program.

- o FSL only requires 26 hours of training over three days.
- o Former Ohio School Board member Lisa Woods participated in one such training. In an exercise on the final day of her training, a simulated active shooter drill, she mistakenly simulated shooting a student who was not the active shooter. This situation illustrated the grave danger of inadequate training.
- o FSL uses Islamophobic and racist training materials. For example, FSL trainees are taught to associate the common Arabic phrase “Allahu Akbar” with an Islamic terrorist attack. “Allahu Akbar” simply means “God is most great” and is used by Muslims in prayers and as a general declaration of faith or thankfulness.

I hope the Committee will focus on passing HB 1, which includes funding to have train individuals address school safety, and our commonsense amendments. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I welcome any questions.