

Testimony on House Bill 99
House Criminal Justice Committee
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Opposition to HB 99

Submitted by: Marti Barker

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to House Bill 99. My name is Marti Barker, and I'm a resident of Bellbrook, Ohio. I'm also a retired officer of the U.S. Air Force and life-long, fiercely Independent voter. In recent years I've advocated for Gun Sense legislation out of deep concern for the safety and well-being of my two teenage daughters...one a freshman in high school, the other in her first year of college.

I got involved with gun violence prevention and school safety after the mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in February 2018. The evening news came on as I was relaxing on the living room couch, still dressed in my fatigues after a long, stressful day at work. My youngest daughter, who was in sixth grade at the time, took notice of the reporting about the tragic incident and commented in the most chilling, matter-of-fact manner: "You know, Mom, if that ever happens at my school, I hope I'm in Ms. [Jones] class because her classroom has a door to outside. But I really hope it doesn't happen while I'm in Mr. [Smith's] class because there aren't any windows or doors in his room." Hearing these words come from my baby girl without any real emotion or concern, landed on me like a ton of bricks. I realized at that moment, unlike me and generations before me, she had not had the luxury of going to school without worrying about her own safety and well-being. She is, in fact, the exact same age as the children who were killed during the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in December 2012...a gut-wrenching episode that ushered in a new "skill" taught in our nation's schools: active shooter drills. These children, who are now freshmen in high school, have lost an innocence and sense of carefree security that breaks my heart.

...And it makes me angry because we, the collective "adults in the room," have failed to protect that carefree innocence that we took for granted as children growing up in America. What's worse is I don't think we've taken any meaningful measures that would prevent one of these mass shootings in our schools since they started at Columbine nearly 22 years ago. To the contrary, we've apparently accepted that school shootings are just the price we pay for living in a free society. So instead of trying to prevent school shootings, let's put a gun in a good guy's hands to attempt to minimize the collateral

damage when they happen. Indeed, HB 99 hinges on the assumption that school shootings are inevitable.

In doing so, we've signaled to our children, now an entire generation, that we don't have the will to put in place measures that would significantly reduce the likelihood of similar school shootings occurring again. It's no wonder kids these days have so many mental and emotional issues. They see an apathy for their safety and well-being exhibited by those who are supposed to protect them. And that apathy is perceived as a lack of love and compassion...and I get it. Who wouldn't feel unloved and unprotected when we've allowed, virtually unmitigated, for these types of senseless and often preventable (with common sense legislation) shootings to continue? ...If we aren't going to make the changes necessary to drive down the likelihood of active shooter incidents occurring in our schools and universities, we ought not create an opportunity for one by allowing loaded weapons to be carried by school employees with very little training.

HB 99 would authorize any school employee—even one with as little as 8 hours of training in firearms—to carry a loaded firearm into a school if that person has written authorization from the school board. There is no amount of training that makes it safe for teachers to carry guns in schools, but this bill would increase the likelihood of accidental shootings by gutting the training Ohio law currently requires and allowing staff members to carry guns in schools without extensive safety training (<https://tinyurl.com/ETSchoolSafety>). Loosening restrictions on firearms in schools is a recipe for accidental school shootings, increasing the risk of harm to students and school employees. Further, relaxing training requirements is intended to allow more guns on school campuses. But introducing more guns in schools does NOT effectively deter assailants from carrying out school shootings. Counter to the premise of this bill, introducing more guns in schools *increases* the risk of gun violence (<https://everytownresearch.org/issue/guns-in-schools#what-is-the-problem>). Simply put, more guns = more gun violence. Certainly that appears to be the case in recent months, as we've witnessed a startling uptick in gun violence across the country in tandem with a huge spike in handgun purchases (<https://www.thetrace.org/2020/07/coronavirus-gun-sales-increased-shootings-study/>; <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/358/6368/1324.abstract>; <https://www.thetrace.org/2020/04/gun-safety-research-coronavirus-gun-sales/>).

In closing, I ask that you please oppose HB 99 and instead propose measures that would effectively reduce the likelihood of active shooter incidents occurring in the first place. These include universal background checks, limits to magazine capacities, extreme risk protection laws, robust mental healthcare programs and, yes, even bans on military-style assault weapons.