

Testimony on House Bill 99
House Criminal Justice Committee
March 24, 2021

Submitted by:
Michelle Bell

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 Michelle Bell, an Ohio resident, and voter. I am a mother, grandmother educator, and retiree. I urge you to vote against HB 99 which will put more guns in our schools by arming teachers and relaxing training requirements. I have one grandchild in elementary school and one grandchild in high school. Passing this bill heightens my concerns and fear for their safety.

"In an average year, 1,529 people die by guns in Ohio (everytown.org)". This number will increase with more guns in schools and homes (assuming that the gun will be their personal responsibility). "Having access to a gun in the classroom increases the likelihood that a student will access a gun and that someone will be shot outside of an active shooter incident. Schools are places for books and backpacks, not weapons" (everytown.org). Moreover, an armed teacher cannot, in a moment of extreme duress and confusion, be expected to transform into a specially trained law enforcement officer.

On February 10, 2019 I became a gun violence survivor when my son Andre Brown was killed while sitting in a car. Although it has been 25 months, there are times when it seems like only 25 weeks, 25 days, and 25 minutes have passed. Gunfire, a near split-second event changed my life forever. One of life's most traumatic events is my reality. I buried my child.

The challenges and difficulties associated with murder loss seem insurmountable. The healing process is never-ending. Grief hits like a ton of bricks and the future seems bleak. My heart is heavy from the pain that is very overwhelming and yet it feels empty by the loss of my son. I pray that no other parent will experience this pain and become part of this group.

Nevertheless, "in an average year, 1,529 people die by guns in Ohio (everytown.org)". Unfortunately, more parents have buried children as a result of guns.

I agree that education and preparedness help minimize and ultimately end gun violence. I don't agree that arming teachers with minimal training is part of that process. In my opinion, there is no amount of training that makes it safe for teachers to carry guns in schools. As an educator, I see HB 99 turning passion and dedication to stress, fear, and anxiety while introducing new risks in schools.

In Ohio, the rate of gun deaths increased 34% from 2010 to 2019, compared to a 17% increase nationwide (everytown.org). HB 99 fuels more lives lost by gunfire with more guns in homes and at school.

I urge you to vote against HB99.
Michelle Bell