

Testimony on House Bill 99

Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:

Kathryn Knue Przywara

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 HB 99.

My name is Kathryn Knue Przywara. I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and I have lived in the Montgomery/Symmes Township area since 1988. My husband and I raised our two sons in Ohio and they are the products of Ohio public schools. We are the proud grandparents of two grandsons. My oldest son is a teacher who began his teaching career in Ohio at Sycamore High School. My mom is retired, having taught for years in the Lakota Local School District here in Ohio. I am a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and the Maurer School of Law at Indiana University (Bloomington). I am currently licensed to practice law in Ohio and the District of Columbia. After practicing law for over 30 years, I retired at the end of 2019.

I am strongly opposed to Ohio HB 99. The proposed bill exempts from the peace officer training requirement in ORC 109.78 those persons (including teachers or others) authorized by a school board of education or governing body to carry loaded firearms in a school safety zone. In other words, this bill would allow untrained and unqualified individuals to carry loaded weapons in Ohio schools. Let me briefly summarize some of the many reasons for my opposition to this bill:

First, Ohio will lose good teachers if this bill passes. Teachers overwhelmingly oppose arming teachers in schools. See "New NEA national survey: educators overwhelmingly reject proposals to arm teachers," March 13, 2018 News Release, *nea.org*. I spoke to my son at length about this issue before drafting my letter. He told me that if teachers were permitted to carry guns in schools, he would likely find another line of work. My son wanted to teach and be a role model to high school students and I suspect that is the case for many other teachers. Teachers do not get into the teaching profession because they want to carry a firearm.

Not only does the proposed bill limit the requirement of adequate safety training, it does not even require the person authorized by the school board to carry a firearm to have any connection with the school. The last thing we need is for an armed, uninformed individual to rush into our schools without an abundance of safety training including instruction in the proper use of a firearm, the ability to assess a situation and the ability to respond appropriately. This would be dangerous and increase the risk for error. What if the untrained individual believes there is reason to discharge his or her weapon and mistakenly hits an innocent bystander, either because the shot is inaccurate or the individual mistakenly believes someone trying to get away from a dangerous situation is an active shooter? Moreover, should we be shooting at anyone running *away* from a

situation? How does a police officer responding to a report of an active shooter on school grounds distinguish the teacher or other authorized individual with a gun from the active shooter? What happens when the untrained individual mistakenly brandishes or shoots a firearm before trying to take measure of a situation and engage in appropriate de-escalation efforts? We Ohioans love our high

school sports. Emotional altercations in the middle of sporting events have been the subject of a number of news reports including in Ohio. Imagine introducing a loaded firearm in the context of one of these outbursts. In fact, guns in the hands of adults in schools are frequently mishandled. See Drane, Kelly, "Every Incident of Mishandled Guns in Schools," <https://giffords.org/blog/2020/03/every-incident-of-mishandled-guns-in-schools-blog/>, Giffords: Courage to Fight Gun Violence, posted March 2, 2020, accessed July 18, 2020.

We want more, not less, safety training for qualified individuals to protect our children and grandchildren and the teachers who teach them. Trained resource officers, like the wonderful officer who was assigned to the high school that my sons attended, can be an important tool in protecting Ohio students because of their training and experience and because they become a part of the school community. Many times, these officers have the ability to recognize and address a problem before it escalates. The untrained individuals, especially those unconnected to the school, are there only to brandish and potentially use their firearms. Let me point out that even Sergeant David Spicer who claimed to testify in favor of the proposed legislation admitted that concealed carry training was only a *start* for firearms training and that persons authorized to carry weapons in schools needed continued training including more enhanced range training, hallway movement training and building clearing tactics.

The presence of loaded firearms on school grounds, particularly in the hands of inadequately trained individuals, would only increase the risk that children will have access to the weapon. Do not underestimate this fact – some students will know which individuals have the guns and how to disarm them. Imagine a teacher with a gun breaking up the inevitable fight among high school students. How easy would it be for one of the students to disarm the teacher during a scuffle? Guns stored in locked drawers and cabinets can also be the targets of theft. We are all aware of instances where money and other items of value are stolen from student lockers and teachers' locked drawers. And, as we have unfortunately seen in Ohio, first grade students at an elementary school near Columbus were able to find a gun used as part of a concealed carry program intended to protect students and remove the gun from its unlocked case. See <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20190816/first-graders-had-access-to-gun-meant-to-prevent-school-violence> (August 16, 2019).

Finally, I wanted to follow up on some of Ranking Member Leland's questions and comments during the proponent testimony for this bill. Even if the legislature were to ignore overwhelming opposition and allow school boards to authorize the arming teachers and other inadequately trained individuals, the bill should at least require a school board's decision to become public. Parents should have this information so that they can make the informed decision whether to keep their children in the community's

public schools, send them to a private school or move. Moreover, this is information that voters in the community need to consider when electing school board members. While my children are long grown, I am ma reliable voter and I will not vote for a school board member who would allow teachers and other inadequately trained individuals to have guns in our local schools and I would think long and hard about whether to support any levies for the schools.

Like all of you, I want Ohio school children and teachers to be safe. However, more, not less training of professional peace officers is the answer, not guns in the hands of teachers and other unqualified individuals with less than 10 hours of training. Thank you for considering my letter. I strongly urge you and the other members of your committee to discontinue hearings on Ohio H.B. 99.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathryn Knue Przywara