

April 12, 2021
HB 99

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My Name is Sandra Fiehrer. I'm a mother of two, a gun owner and a community volunteer. I cannot believe that I have to submit testimony AGAIN against this ridiculous bill while moms everywhere are worrying about sending their children back to school in a pandemic and the country continues to reel from gun violence yet again today. I became an advocate for gun violence prevention years ago after I saw our state legislature refusing to address the rise of gun violence in schools. Today, you are still refusing, choosing instead to add to the risk.

I'm beyond frustrated by the persistent toxic disconnect between this legislature and the majority of Ohio constituents. I am opposed to HB99 and so is EVERY teacher and parent that I know. Handling a firearm in a school safety zone should require extensive live training.

As we continue to face the challenges of this global pandemic, it's infuriating that your legislative priority is to expand the use of guns in our schools while decreasing training requirements. Make no mistake, introducing more guns into schools actually increases the risk of gun violence. There have been numerous incidents already where a gun has been discharged by the staff on school grounds.¹ It is a fact that gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color negatively and schools in these communities will no doubt be similarly impacted. Are you paying attention at all to what is going on in this country? In the central Ohio community? Do you understand the issues driving the national civil unrest right now? Why would you bring that into schools in Ohio? Every teacher I know opposes allowing guns in schools, full stop. School safety experts agree. I'm worried for my friends who are teachers and my friends' children in school.

HB99 would exempt teachers from the current state training requirement: basic peace officer training or 20 years of active duty as a peace officer. Allowing armed personnel in schools with just 8 hours or less of concealed carry training is a grave mistake that will cost lives. It serves one purpose, to override the court decision against allowing this. This bill aims to nullify the 12th Circuit Court of Appeals decision against Madison Local Schools (in Senator Coley's district) who wanted to pass a resolution to allow firearms in school safety zones without the required safety training. You're willing to put all Ohio students and staff at risk to appease one district. This will not reduce school shootings.

The gun lobby attempts to justify these policies by invoking fear of active shooter situations. We've had enough of their fear mongering. Allowing untrained guns in schools creates more risk. There's no way 6 hours of live training prepares you to face a mass shooter. This bill serves ALEC and the Ohio gun lobbyists who continue to push their dangerous legislation.

¹ Seltzer A, Winston H, Hitchcock O. Breaking: Man arrested in 2013 murder of Dreyfoos school janitors. The Palm Beach Post. May 25, 2017. <https://pbco.st/2RE4R8V>. Schrott M. Officer accidentally discharges weapon at George Washington Middle School. Alexandria Times. March 13, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2BnC8zT>. See also: Everytown For Gun Safety. Gunfire on School Grounds. <https://bit.ly/2ZMXpj>

Arming civilians with less training than law enforcement officers is not an effective way to stop school shootings.²

I am asking you to stop listening to lobbyists and PACS and listen to constituents who are teachers and parents. As my 80 year old Mom, also your constituent said “this makes no sense.’

Last month, my daughter was at work when shooting erupted across the street, at Polaris Town Center. Today, my son left work at St. Ann’s Hospital moments before a shooting occurred there. Every single day we’re at risk for a close call. Why should children feel that in the classroom? Why should teachers feel that at work? Guns in the room, especially without extensive training increase the risk of deadly violence. Teachers are there to teach, not stand guard. We’re still in the midst of a pandemic. How is THIS what you should be working on right now as my representatives? Why do I have to keep spending my time writing testimony? I have talked about guns in classrooms with many neighbors, voters in our precincts and Ohioans and I am shocked that you don’t get that this is not what we want at all. Or maybe I’m not now that we’ve all seen that you believe you’re unaccountable. This is for the lobbyists, not the parents and teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I again ask you to vote no on House Bill 99.

² Rostker BD, Hanser LM, Hix WM, et al. Evolution of the New York City Police Department firearm training and firearm discharge review process. Rand Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG717.html>. Published 2008