

Testimony on House Bill 99
CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
April 14, 2021
Submitted by: Ariel Miller

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 Ariel Miller. I am a member of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio's Becoming Beloved Community Leadership Team. I am writing on behalf of all Ohio school children, including my granddaughters – one eight, and one who just turned 11 this week - who are students in the Forest Hills District, Anderson Township. **By putting guns in the hands of people with virtually no required training, this bill will increase – not reduce - the risk of children being shot in school.** The risk is especially great for children of color.

I am also writing out of concern for you. I don't want you to pass this bill, then turn on the news to hear that an untrained adult, carrying a loaded weapon in school because of your vote, has shot a child. Please prevent this needless danger. Defeat this bill now.

As facilities chair of my parish in Wyoming, Ohio in 2018, I was responsible for developing active shooter protocols, including trying to find ways to protect our preschool and Sunday School children. I attended a briefing by Wyoming's police chief, who told us it is extremely difficult to shoot accurately when the target is moving, even if a person is a trained police officer. **This bill poses unacceptable risks to children and school staff.** They could be struck by shots intended for the perpetrator. A school staff member who feels threatened and who reacts from a fright or flight impulse could shoot a student during a perceived confrontation.

The Diocese of Southern Ohio Becoming Beloved Community initiative is part of the Episcopal Church's nationwide work to bring about racial justice and reconciliation. As a member of this leadership team, **I am keenly aware of data on the disproportionate rate at which Black students are treated as severe discipline problems in U.S. schools. Students of color are put at greatest risk by arming minimally-trained teachers or staff.** SB 317 terrifies many of my Black friends with children or grandchildren in Ohio schools. If you pass this bill, you will send a terrible message, increasing Black parents' anxiety in the middle of a nationwide crisis over the shooting of unarmed Black people – including 12-year-old Tamir Rice of Cleveland.

Current Ohio law requires extensive peace officer training for armed staff in schools. Don't change that. Please, please, drop this bill and focus instead on proposals that will truly increase the safety of our children, teachers, and school staff. Thank you for reading my testimony. I ask God to bless and guide you in your important work.

Sincerely,
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