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To begin, I would first like to thank Chairman LaRe and the honorable Representatives for taking the time to read this testimony against HR 99. Taking the opinions of constituents into consideration reminds us all that our democracy is truly for, and by, the people.

Almost two years ago, nine people were killed in a mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio. Upon hearing the news that such a tragedy occurred only hours from my hometown of Toledo, Ohio, I decided it was time for me to take action and stand up for what I believe in: common sense gun reform. I co-founded Students Demand Action Toledo and eventually joined our Ohio Virtual Field Office as a leader united with other student activists across our state in a movement to end gun violence.

As the coronavirus pandemic spreads and kills across our nation and the globe, another epidemic persists, that of gun violence in America. For me and my fellow students, returning to school is sure to be a stressful experience, but one that we will take in stride because we have all missed the routine of learning that we used to take for granted. However, there is no need for any added stressors to contribute to this situation. In a world where active shooter drills have become the norm for students as young as five years old, undoubtedly causing increased levels of anxiety and stress in a classroom environment, and during a global pandemic, arming teachers would only complicate and worsen the circumstances.

It is first important to note that the very notion of arming teachers has been met with harsh criticism across the board. Teachers, themselves, through the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association oppose arming teachers¹, as does the National Association of School Psychologists². According to a recent survey, 63% of parents of K-12 students, the guardians of the very children the school must protect, are also against this practice¹. If the majority of parents do not support it, why are we even considering arming teachers?

Current Ohio law already allows for armed school employees, contingent on a basic peace officer training course. House Bill 99 takes this one step further by removing this requirement, allowing teachers and other school personnel to be armed with minimal or no proper training. In opposition to arming teachers, the National Association of School Resource Officers notes that without proper training and regular shooting practice under high-stress simulations, such practices could lead to increased tragedy³. Even members of the New York City Police Department, some of the most highly trained law enforcement officers in the nation, understand that accuracy in shooting decreases significantly in a gunfight¹: how would a teacher, especially one that lacks basic training, be able to shoot accurately under the pressures of an active shooter situation? The average police officer completes 168 hours of weapons training¹. By eliminating all training requirements, House Bill 99 is endangering our students, teachers, law enforcement, and all other personnel.

In addition, access to guns has been shown to have a strong correlation to gun violence, tripling the risk of death by suicide and doubling the risk of death by homicide¹. There have already been several incidents of guns being misplaced, left in bathrooms, locker rooms, or the like, and ending up in the hands of students¹. Even with precautions limiting child access, unintentional or intentional shootings have been shown to rise as teachers are armed, from a janitor who intentionally killed colleagues in Florida to accidental discharging of firearms by teachers¹. As the research shows, availability of firearms will only lead to increased risk.

Additional research has suggested that arming teachers could lead to a negative culture of fear for students, especially students of color. As students of color are disproportionately disciplined, the notion of arming teachers has also been connected to decreasing high school graduation and college enrollment¹, for these students. The goal of our education system is to support and help students grow to their full potential: the presence of guns in the hands of their educators will only lead to increased stress and lowered academic achievement. As a high school student myself, I know that I would never feel comfortable in a classroom where a firearm is present, especially if my teacher had not received the proper training beforehand.

The practicality of this bill must also be taken into account: despite arguments that arming teachers is a cost-effective replacement for law enforcement, the reality is that this endeavor would cost billions of dollars for salaries, proper training, and insurance, especially considering many insurance companies understand the financial and legal risk and are hesitant to cover schools with armed teachers¹.

Instead of this dangerous and impractical approach to school safety, Ohio should lead the way to a safer future by focusing on proven methods to prevent gun violence. By passing common sense gun laws, including HB134 to introduce extreme risk laws, and HB183, which would require background checks on all gun sales, Ohio would work on this public health emergency that is the gun violence epidemic at its core. Instead of pursuing reactionary procedures, these preemptive laws would reduce the amount of firearms in the hands of those who are at risk of harming themselves or others and protect Ohioans without ever relying on a frightened, inexperienced teacher armed with a gun. For these reasons, I strongly encourage you to vote against House Bill 99.

¹ Everytown for Gun Safety. Keeping our kids safe at school: a plan to stop mass shootings and end gun violence in American schools. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/a-plan-for-preventing-mass-shootings-and-ending-all-gun-violence-in-american-schools/#arming-teachers-is-dangerous>. February 2019.

² National Association of School Psychologists. NASP Opposes Arming Teachers. <https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/media-room/press-releases/nasp-opposes-arming-teachers#:~:text=Bethesda%2C%20MD%E2%80%94The%20National%20Association,gun%20violence%20on%20school%20grounds.&text=NASP%20also%20strongly%20believes%20that,commissioned%20trained%20school%20resource%20officers>. Published February 2018.

³ National Association of School Resource Officers. NASRO opposes arming teachers. <https://www.nasro.org/news/2018/02/22/news-releases/nasro-opposes-arming-teachers/>. Published February 2018.