

Testimony on House Bill 99

House Criminal Justice Committee

March 24, 2021

Submitted by:

Sarah Ramirez

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 Sarah Ramirez, and I am an mother, school counselor, doctoral student, and longtime educator in a large urban school district in Ohio.

According to The Ohio Department of Education website, there are 3583 public schools in the State of Ohio (ODE, 2020). This does not include the over 1200 private schools in the state.

According to the data collected by Everytown for Gun Safety up to and including 2020, there have been 14 "school shootings" within or on the grounds of primary or secondary schools in Ohio since 2013. Of these, several occurred on school grounds but not during school hours and many of these shootings did not involve minors. One was a drive-by shooting with persons in a car on the street shooting at persons on school grounds. Of the shootings that did occur in school buildings, 1 was perpetrated by an adult sports referee whose concealed gun accidentally went off on school grounds- no one was injured. This man could legally carry with his CCW, but should have not had the gun on school grounds. Strike one against "responsible adults with guns." Three of these school shootings were grounded in suicidal ideation, one of which was unsuccessful.

Of the **two** remaining school shootings in Ohio since 2013 reported by Everytown for Gun Safety, one 14 year-old student fired shots in the school building and was TALKED down by a teacher and surrendered without harming anyone. In the other shooting, which did involve the

homicide of another student, the perpetrator aged 17 at the time was arrested and taken into custody.

A school shooting is a terrible thing, Many of these incidents are characterized as school shootings when in fact they only occur on school grounds outside of school hours and do not involve school events. Arming teachers would have no impact on these events. For the extremely infrequent incidents that DO occur within the school building, a teacher who is armed might cause more harm than good. Take for instance the 14 year old who came into the building armed. If a teacher in that building has been armed, this young man might have been fatally shot, instead of being talked into surrendering his weapon. The 17 year old who did fatally injure a classmate might have been killed himself instead of being arrested and tried.

Psychologically most students through COLLEGE age do not have a completely operational prefrontal cortex, which means they often act before they rationalize. While bringing a gun to school is absolutely unacceptable, losing ones life because a teacher with little training is trying to be a "hero" or misreads a situation is not the best option.

I have been a school counselor in Ohio for 21 years. I had been at a football game in 2019 where shots were fired. A few weeks prior to this game, there were shots fired at a Central Catholic High School football game nearby. Fortunately, there were no injuries at either of these games. There **was** a heavy security presence of both city police, county sheriffs, and school security officers. None of them discharged their weapons. Suspects were never found. If there had been teachers in the crowd with guns, maybe some innocent people would have been injured or killed by people who had not enough training and had over-reacted. As stated before, the accidental discharge of a weapon in an Ohio school was the fault of an adult in that building.

I work in a high school and know that students do know what is going on around them. If there were teachers who had weapons in their classrooms or on their persons, students would know

this, and this would spread like wildfire through social media. In a high school or even a junior high, students are as large, often stronger and more nimble than many teachers. If a student, being irrational like teenagers tend to be at times, wanted to wrestle that gun from the teacher or jimmy the cabinet where it was located and turn it on a classmate or a teacher, it would not be all that difficult.

We have the good fortune to have a city officer in our building. He has gone through the extensive training to use his weapon judiciously. In the 21 years that I have been at this school, I know of zero times when one of our officers has been forced to pull his gun to protect someone in our building. They have arrested and assisted in controlling situations and are welcome members of the staff.

The teachers I work with are highly trained professionals with bachelors and masters degrees. The training they have received is in educating students, not protecting them. That is what officers are trained to do. More guns in schools means more opportunities for students and/or faculty and staff to be shot whether intentionally or not. Teachers should not be armed with anything more than books and knowledge.

Instead of expecting teachers to do one more thing in the schools, mostly untrained and completely outside of their purview, legislators who are concerned with the safety of students in buildings (where remember, there have only been actually 2 incidents during the school day where students have fired shots not directed at themselves over the past 7 years) should fund armed officers, not support arming teachers.

<https://maps.everytownresearch.org/gunfire-in-school/#7389>

<http://education.ohio.gov/Media/Facts-and-Figures>

<https://www.whio.com/news/local/report-shot-possibly-fired-during-altercation-basketball-court-beavercreek-school/pik2z70Vnp3YXYCS9M5YKN/>

<https://abc6onyourside.com/news/local/police-investigating-double-shooting-at-africentric-high-school>

<https://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2016/10/13/two-shot-outside-school.html>

https://www.cleveland.com/metro/2015/05/man_killed_in_double_shooting.html

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