

Testimony on House Bill 99

House Criminal Justice Committee

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Submitted by:
Todd Sautters

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 Todd Sautters and I currently live in Columbus, OH, and I teach social studies at Canal Winchester High School. I am an Ohio resident and voter. I am writing to you to discontinue hearings on House Bill (HB) 99, because I am strongly against the changes it can bring to our schools. It will make schools more dangerous.

My opinion on this bill is shaped by my personal experience. I taught for a few years in Maryland, before returning to Ohio. On the first day of school in 2012, during the first lunch shift, a student carrying a shotgun opened fire into the cafeteria. It was around 10:30 in the morning at Perry Hall High School, outside of Baltimore, MD. Students were in line to get their food, trying to pick their lunch table in which they would sit for most of the year. It's safe to say there were over 300 students in the cafeteria that day. He shot and wounded a schoolmate. It was my fourth year in my teaching career. A career I chose to help students learn.

On the first day of school in 2012, we were lucky. We were lucky that a school counselor and two other teachers were able to apprehend the student before he was able to hurt anyone else. They did so without a gun themselves.

On the first day of school in 2012, my fourth period class and I sat in lockdown until the afternoon. We waited for hours as police ensured the rest of the school was clear.

On the first day of school in 2012, a police officer dressed in military gear escorted me and my students out of the building. The students were able to safely reunite with their families and parents.

For the rest of the school year in 2012, students, teachers, administrators, custodians, cafeteria workers lived through trauma because of the presence and use of ONE gun in school that day.

For the rest of the school year in 2012, students, teachers, administrators, custodians, cafeteria workers lived always with one eye looking at the exits because of the presence and use of ONE gun in school that day.

Adding more guns to that day would not have made anyone safer. It would have made it more dangerous.

Supporters of HB 99 want more teachers, administrators, custodians, and cafeteria workers to carry guns themselves. And they want everyone to work, teach, and learn in the presence of MORE guns.

HB 99 would allow teachers and school staff to carry loaded guns in Ohio elementary, middle, and high schools without completing the safety training required by current Ohio law.

Under current state law, all armed school employees—including teachers, security guards, and special police—must either complete an approved basic peace officer training course, or have completed 20 years of active duty as a peace officer. Basic peace officer training is regulated by the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission, and comprises approximately 728 hours of instruction.

But HB 99 would exempt teachers from this requirement, and allow school districts to employ armed personnel in schools with as little as 8 hours of concealed carry training (6 of which can be completed online).

At The Ohio State University, I spent countless hours in college learning history, political science, and geography. I spent hundreds of hours earning a masters degree from Ohio State in order to become a teacher. All of this training is required to legally carry a teaching license to school. HB 99 would require only EIGHT hours to legally carry a gun to school.

As a high school teacher in Canal Winchester, OH, I am confident the effects of this bill will lead to more dangerous schools. Every gun found within a school increases danger. When danger increases, learning stops. We spend so much time preparing for times of danger -- fire drills, tornado drills, active shooter drills. How does a student prepare for learning in a school in the presence of MORE guns? How does a student learn in a place where people only need 8 hours of training to carry a gun to school?

A high school athlete completes at least 8 hours of practice in their first week of season. I don't know many high school coaches who would consider their players ready to play in a game after only 8 hours of practice.

HB 99 would consider teachers ready to carry a gun in school with only 8 hours of practice.

A student in a classroom in which the teacher is carrying a gun is a dangerous classroom. We need less guns in school, not more.

As a result, I strongly encourage you to discontinue hearings on House Bill 99.

Thank you for your time.

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