

Aaron Grant  
HB99 Testimony  
House Criminal Justice Committee  
April 15, 2021

My name is Aaron Grant and I am testifying in opposition to HB 99 in my personal capacity. I am a police officer with the Madeira Police Department in Cincinnati. I am also a former teacher and spent a decade teaching in the Madison Local School District in Butler County. During my last year as a teacher at Madison, there was a shooting in our school cafeteria in 2016. That was the year I left teaching to become a police officer.

One of the first things I learned at police academy is that as a police officer, when you respond to an incident, you are introducing the means of lethal force to the situation because you are carrying a gun. It is critically important that officers are properly trained when to use their gun, how to use their gun, and how to keep control over both their gun as well as the situation when they are responding. This is why we train so hard on things like subject control, including weapons retention, during basic peace officer training. In fact, the basic OPOTA course for police officers includes 70 hours of training on this subject alone.

HB 99 is dangerous because it would allow teaching staff to carry firearms into Ohio schools with far less training than this. As introduced, HB 99 would require only eight hours of concealed carry training. Even if the bill were amended, to require teachers to attend the three-day FASTER course put on by the Ohio gun lobby, the training for armed staff would be dangerously inadequate and put children's lives at risk.

The risks of putting firearms in the hands of poorly trained school staff are numerous and well-documented. One risk is that students will gain access to a teacher's gun, as has happened in numerous high-profile incidents, including one in 2019 at Highland Elementary School in Sparta, Ohio. During this incident, two first graders found an administrator's loaded handgun and began playing with it.<sup>1</sup> The danger is not just limited to firearms misplaced by inexperienced or poorly trained armed staff. As retired Cincinnati Police Captain and police academy instructor, Howard Rahtz testified during the *Gabbard* lawsuit that any time an armed staff member interacts with an "unruly student...they have inserted a gun into the situation and risk having the weapon taken from them."<sup>2</sup> This is why the dangers posed by an officer's own gun are drilled into new police recruits from the moment they begin basic training.

Poorly trained armed staff are also unlikely to respond effectively in a crisis, putting bystanders at greater risk of being shot accidentally, and increasing the risk of deadly force used in situations when it is unjustified. Research shows that the physiological stress of a critical

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<sup>1</sup> See Columbus Dispatch, First graders had access to gun meant to prevent school violence, Aug. 16, 2019, available at <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20190816/first-graders-had-access-to-gun-meant-to-prevent-school-violence>; see also Giffords Law Center, Every Incident of Mishandled Guns in Schools, Mar. 2, 2020, available at <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/every-incident-of-mishandled-guns-in-schools/>.

<sup>2</sup> Oct. 31, 2018 Rahtz Aff., ¶ 38.

incident taxes the shooting accuracy of even well-trained law enforcement.<sup>3</sup> This is part of the reason that Ohio's peace officer training programs include significant training on critical incident stress awareness and conditioning.

As someone who has experienced both professions of an educator and law enforcement, I know that if the time comes when I have to draw my service weapon to protect myself or others, I will fall back on my training. That training must be rigorous, it must be realistic, and it must be repeated because these skills are extremely perishable. I did not have these skills in my decade spent teaching and neither eight hours of CCW training nor three short days of FASTER training would have come anywhere close to preparing me to use a gun to protect my classroom. Because HB 99 would allow school staff to carry firearms in school with dangerously inadequate training, I strongly oppose this bill and respectfully ask that the members of this committee do so as well.

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<sup>3</sup> See Bernard D. Rostker et al., "Evaluation of the New York City Police Department Firearm Training and Firearm-Discharge Review Process" (RAND Corporation, 2008), <https://bit.ly/2U9bk0t>.