

Testimony on House Bill 99
Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:
Kathryn Knue Przywara

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 HB 99. My name is Kathryn Knue Przywara. I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and I have lived in the Montgomery/Symmes Township area since 1988. My husband and I raised our two sons in Ohio and they are the products of Ohio public schools. We are the proud grandparents of two grandsons. My oldest son is a teacher who began his teaching career in Ohio at Sycamore High School. My mom is retired, having taught for years in the Lakota Local School District here in Ohio. I am a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and the Maurer School of Law at Indiana University (Bloomington). I am currently licensed to practice law in Ohio and the District of Columbia. After practicing law for approximately 35 years, I retired at the end of 2019.

I am strongly opposed to Ohio HB 99 and the bill as amended. The proposed amended bill exempts from the peace officer training requirement in ORC 109.78 those persons (including teachers or others) authorized by a school board of education or governing body to carry loaded firearms in a school safety zone. In an attempt to be able to claim that the amended bill establishes training requirements, the bill's sponsors have included only a very small number of hours of weapons training to replace the current requirement of Ohio Peace Office training (737 hours) or 20 years of peace office experience. In effect, the amended bill would still allow nominally trained individuals (including school staff) to carry loaded weapons in Ohio schools. Let me briefly summarize some of the many reasons for my opposition to this bill:

First, Ohio will lose good teachers if this bill passes. Teachers overwhelmingly oppose arming teachers in schools. See "New NEA national survey: educators overwhelmingly reject proposals to arm teachers," March 13, 2018 News Release, *nea.org*. My son, like many teachers, wanted to teach and be a role model to high school students, not carry a loaded weapon in his school. He has told me that if teachers were permitted to carry guns in schools, he would likely find another line of work.

Not only does the proposed bill limit the requirement of adequate safety training, it does not even require the person authorized by the school board to carry a firearm to have any connection with the school. The last thing we need is for an armed, uninformed individual to rush into our schools without an abundance of safety training, not only in the proper use of a firearm but also the ability to assess a situation and the ability to respond appropriately. This would be dangerous and increase the risk for error. What if the untrained individual believes there is reason to discharge his or her weapon and mistakenly hits an innocent bystander, either because the shot is inaccurate or the

individual mistakenly believes someone trying to get away from a dangerous situation is an active shooter? Moreover, should we be shooting at anyone running away from a situation? How does a police officer responding to a report of an active shooter on school grounds distinguish the teacher or other authorized individual with a gun from the active shooter? What happens when the untrained individual mistakenly brandishes or shoots a firearm before trying to take measure of a situation and engage in appropriate de-escalation efforts? We Ohioans love our high school sports. Emotional altercations in the middle of sporting events have been the subject of a number of news reports including in Ohio. Imagine introducing a loaded firearm in the context of one of these outbursts. In fact, guns in the hands of adults in schools are frequently mishandled. See Drane, Kelly, "Every Incident of Mishandled Guns in Schools," <https://giffords.org/blog/2020/03/every-incident-of-mishandled-guns-in-schools-blog/>, Giffords: Courage to Fight Gun Violence, posted March 2, 2020, accessed July 18, 2020.

The original bill only required a concealed carry license (8 hours training with 2 hours in person gun instruction). The amended bill adds the requirement of 18 hours of loading, holstering, shooting, unloading and clearing instruction and no more than 2 hours of annual additional instruction. The fiscal analysis of the bill estimates a cost of \$225-250 annual training and \$100 for the additional annual training. On the other hand, the estimate of the tuition for the Ohio Peace Officer Training Program is approximately \$5,000. So, what the sponsors of the bill and the elected representatives who support it are saying is that the safety of Ohio's school children is only worth an initial investment of less than \$500 and then \$100 annually in each school for very rudimentary shooting training, rather than an investment of \$5,000 for extensive training. Clearly, this is an attempt at claiming "safety" on the cheap.

Another issue I have with the required training in the amended bill is that there is no basis for the number of hours of training (18 initial plus 2 annually) specified in the bill. There is no indication that the committee or any of the bill's sponsors have sought input from the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission, the Ohio School Resource Officers Association, educators or administrators. It is also clear from the amended bill that the training specified in the bill (various tactical stances and firing requirements) are only aimed at killing someone. School environments demand more considerations.

We want more, not less, safety training for qualified individuals to protect our children and grandchildren and the teachers who teach them. Trained resource officers, like the wonderful officer who was assigned to the high school that my sons attended, can be an important tool in protecting Ohio students because of their training and experience and because they become a part of the school community. Many times, these officers have the ability to recognize and address a problem before it escalates. The nominally trained individuals, especially those unconnected to the school, are there only to brandish, use their firearms and kill someone.

There is no provision in the amended bill for regulating the safe storage or use of loaded firearms by individuals in the schools or how those individuals are to be monitored. In

fact, the presence of loaded firearms on school grounds, particularly in the hands of inadequately trained individuals, would only increase the risk that children will have access to the weapon. Do not underestimate this fact – some students will know which individuals have the guns and how to disarm them. Imagine a teacher with a gun breaking up the inevitable fight among high school students. How easy would it be for one of the students to disarm the teacher during a scuffle? Guns stored in locked drawers and cabinets can also be the targets of theft. We are all aware of instances where money and other items of value are stolen from student lockers and teachers' locked drawers. And, as we have unfortunately seen in Ohio, first grade students at an elementary school near Columbus were able to find a gun used as part of a concealed carry program intended to protect students and remove the gun from its unlocked case. See <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20190816/first-graders-had-access-to-gun-meant-to-prevent-school-violence> (August 16, 2019).

Finally, I did want to thank the committee for at least including language in the amended bill to address the issue of making public the decision of school boards and governing bodies to authorize these nominally trained individuals to carry loaded firearms into schools. Parents should have this information so that they can make the informed decision whether to keep their children in the community's public schools, send them to a private school or move. Moreover, this is information that voters in the community need to consider when electing school board members. While my children are long grown, I am a reliable voter and I will not vote for a school board member who would allow teachers and other inadequately trained individuals to have guns in our local schools and I would think long and hard about whether to support any levies for the schools.

Like all of you, I want Ohio school children and teachers to be safe. However, more, not less training of professional peace officers is the answer, not guns in the hands of teachers and other unqualified individuals with only a minimal amount of training. Thank you for considering my letter. I strongly urge you and the other members of your committee to discontinue hearings on Ohio H.B. 99 and the amended sub bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn Knue Przywara