



**A MULTI-FAITH
COALITION**

WORKING TO REDUCE
GUN VIOLENCE

through

**COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**

EDUCATION

ADVOCACY

and

**CONVENING
& COLLABORATING**

with

**DIVERSE FAITH
COMMUNITIES &
OTHER PARTNERS**

May 30, 2022

Re: Sub. H. B. No. 99*

Dear Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas and Members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

I write to you today on behalf of God Before Guns, A Coalition of Faith Communities and Individuals Working to Reduce Gun Violence.

We urge you to vote in opposition to HB 99, a bill that would minimize the personal training requirements for armed school personnel.

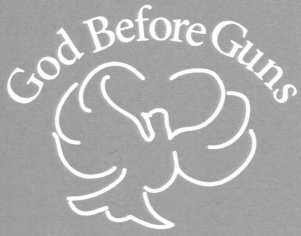
As a retired teacher myself I begin with a memory that many members of the Ohio Legislature share, the memory of crawling under desks as part of the “air raid drills” of the Cold War period. As kids we did what we were told (for the most part) and acted as if we were engaged in a serious activity. But it’s easy to forget a crucial fact: none of us had ever heard of an American kid dying as a result of a missile or an enemy aircraft hitting a school. No kids had died. None.

Now, many years later, our children (many of them are now teachers) and our grandchildren are subject to drills of their own. But consider the difference. Today our kids and grandkids know full well that hundreds of children have been shot and shot at in school. And thousands of American children know someone who died in a school shooting. In many ways our nation has failed our children. It turns out that the greatest threat to school children is home grown armed Americans. And the weapons that are now the #1 killer of American children aren’t foreign missiles, but the firearms available in every American gun store.

How did we get here? We made gun rights sacred in America and Ohio. We put 2nd Amendment rights ahead of all other rights including the right to live and the right to be secure from unnecessary threats to life in our own communities. We armed ourselves against one another.

The gun industry and its promoters have essentially one answer to gun violence: More Guns. (More sales.) They prescribe more guns, more powerful guns, guns in more hands, guns in more places. Somehow this strategy, advocated fiercely in legislatures across the nation and right here in Ohio, continues to drive gun policy. And yet, year after year after year, as gun sales rise and guns become ever more present in our daily lives, the promises of greater security and reduced gun violence are never fulfilled. In fact the opposite is true.

The most recent official figures for gun deaths in Ohio show an incredible 46% increase in gun-related homicides in one year. Since the break-through victory of gun rights advocates in the form of a concealed carry law in 2004, Ohio’s gun deaths have increased by a staggering 70% (while the population



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increased 2%). The strategy of addressing gun violence by easing access to guns is failing spectacularly in Ohio.

HB 99 is one more in a long line of proposals by gun rights advocates to spread guns into more places under the cover of providing for a safer Ohio. By reducing the training requirements for armed school staff members, this bill would make it easier to have guns available in schools for “security.” But, like all other “more guns” proposals, the bill has great potential to make Ohio more dangerous. Schools are crowded, busy places, and making guns quickly available to staff members while keeping the same guns completely unavailable to students is a very challenging task. The training that school staff members need to properly use those guns in a highly charged emergency in that same crowded school should be extensive, ongoing, and far beyond the minimal training proposed in the bill. As recent events have reminded us, even well-trained professional law enforcement personnel struggle to respond effectively and successfully in school shooting situations. And now that school shooters are arming themselves with AR-15’s and wearing body armor, the task of responding effectively without comparable tactical gear becomes increasingly difficult to imagine.

There can be no doubt that teachers and other school staff will respond heroically when called upon to do so. But teaching is a difficult, demanding job. Adding school security to the long list of other demands on school staff is far too much to ask of them, and the overwhelming majority of them are saying “NO” to the idea of being armed in school.

Armed security should remain the purview of professional and highly trained personnel whose only duty and focus is security. Arming school staff is a diversion from the real tasks required to reduce school shootings. Arming school staff is just another “more guns” knee-jerk response from the gun-rights minority, and HB 99 will do nothing to make Ohio kids and their teachers safer. We urge your opposition to this misguided and short-sighted “more guns” proposal.

David Eggert

President, God Before Guns