

88th House District
Seneca and Sandusky County



Committees
Civil Justice
Infrastructure and Rural
Development
Primary and Secondary Education

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Gary Click
State Representative

Chairman Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Lightbody, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 206.

According to the Washington Post, there were 46 school shootings just last year and a total of 346 since Columbine.¹ Six have taken place here in Ohio.

I want you to imagine the fear and sudden anxiety that overwhelmed young teenage girls and boys in my district on December 6, 2022, when a 14 year old young man pulled a gun out of his backpack. The teachers in that school don't have to imagine it, they witnessed it. Our entire community is grateful for the quick response of school staff and the Seneca County Sheriff's Department.

What was the intent of this young man? Did he have ill intent or was he simply trying to show off? Was he simply being reckless or was he malicious? We don't know. Has he learned his lesson? Is he a changed young man? Or is he angry and vengeful? We don't know that either. As an optimist, I would hope for the former but we have no evidence that it is not the latter.

This young man was appropriately suspended from school. However, this January, state law requires that he be readmitted **unconditionally**.²

Educators in my district have come to me seeking a solution to this inflexibility, asking for a way to provide options to a school district looking to ensure the safety of its students and faculty equitably and effectively. We believe HB 206 represents a major step toward that goal by allowing local school districts exactly that: flexibility to ensure safety of their students and their staff.

In their search for a solution, they uncovered this bill formerly introduced by former-representatives Jay Hottinger and Bill Hayes and asked me to reintroduce it. The key component of this bill is to add increased flexibility of the local school to assess the risk of reentry. Every time we see a mass shooting, the first question that arises is "were there warning signs." When schools and law enforcement fail to recognize and respond to the warning signs everyone is

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/school-shootings-database/>

² Sec. 3313.66 (2)(a); on the As-Introduced Draft of HB 206 this section is included beginning on line 83

outraged. However, current law restricts the ability of school administrators to take reasonable precautions.

HB 206 does the following:

- Permits the school board to authorize the superintendent to suspend a student for a period not to exceed 180 days for actions determined to pose an imminent and severe endangerment to pupils and employees of the school.
- Requires the superintendent to establish conditions upon which the student may be reinstated.
- Requires an assessment by a psychiatrist, psychologist, or school psychologist to determine if the pupil is an endangerment to himself, other students or employees of the school.
- Permits the superintendent to suspend the student for an additional 90 days if the predetermined conditions are not met. This may be done at the end of each assessment.
- Permits that a student's parents may request an early assessment if they believe their child has met the benchmarks in advance of the designated time. If requested, the superintendent shall assess the pupil.
- Requires that, no later than five days after suspension, the superintendent shall devise a plan for the continuing education of the student.

We have already met with representatives of the Ohio Educators Association and Ohio School Boards Association, and we are reaching out to the Ohio Federation of Teachers and to the Ohio ACLU to hear concerns and attempt to remove any obstacles that may prevent a speedy passage of this bill. Our local school district will be forced to readmit this student without any assessment in January. We believe that it is urgent that the student be assessed prior to reentry.

We do understand that there may be concerns about unequal enforcement of this provision and we are eager to work with this committee and interested parties to ensure that there are no unintended consequences in our efforts to maintain safe educational environments throughout Ohio.

At this time, I'll yield to my joint-sponsor, Representative Robb-Blasdel for her testimony.

Thank you.