

Representative Blasdel, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 206.

When parents drop their child off at school, the mall, church, or the movie theater, they are taking a chance and hopefully saying a prayer that their child will be safe. This may seem dramatic, but this is the reality parents face every day. When I attended school 30 years ago, the school doors weren't locked and there definitely was not a police officer and cruiser in front of the door as I entered. While hiring school resource officers, locking doors, and practicing safety drills are good, they do not eliminate the threat from within. Schools, unlike other venues, have the ability to help children in crisis before tragedy happens.

Last year a student at my son's middle school got suspended for having a "kill list." The school officials handled the situation exactly as they were supposed to according to the law. The problem is the law does not fully address the problem. Due to privacy constraints, the school was not allowed to share details of the incident. Parents made decisions about their child's safety based on information from their children and rumors.

A mental health issue is often the cause of situations like this, but mental health is rarely addressed during these situations because schools can only recommend that a student consult with a mental health professional. Our school uses CSTAG, which is a comprehensive threat assessment guideline. It is a program vetted by the state of Ohio. A threat assessment team uses CSTAG guidelines in situations like the one mentioned. At the end of the assessment, it may be determined that mental health counseling is needed, but the school cannot enforce it. Parents should be unable to opt out of mental health counseling for their child. Oftentimes, these are the children who need counseling the most.

In the reform of HB 206, mental health counseling should be required as a condition of a student returning to school in these types of situations. I believe students who threaten others should be required to receive mental health counseling with their entire immediate family until that professional deems the student safe to return to school, no matter how long or short that period may be. My reasoning for this is that it would provide peace of mind for the other students, parents and teachers, knowing certain criteria were met, and that the offender was not merely given a 5 day suspension, as was the case at my son's school.

Without the school being able to provide information about the situation or fully address the situation, parents are scared. In the case of our school, parents decided not to send their children to school on the day the suspended student returned. Children were asking parents and grandparents if they thought it was safe for them to go to school when the suspended student returned. Kids who were on "the list" had to be in class with the student who had threatened them. An offender should no longer be permitted to hold parents, students and teachers "hostage" to fear in these situations.

As a former teacher and mother of three children, I believe peace of mind for students, parents and teachers could be achieved by allowing schools to provide more details about incidents and **requiring** mental health counseling for the offenders.