

Testimony on HB 99

House Criminal Justice Committee

Representative Jeff LaRe, Chair

Representative D. J. Swearingen, Vice Chair

Representative David Leland, Ranking Minority Member

Submitted by: Cathi Kulik

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Minority Member Leland and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 99. My name is Cathi Kulik, and I am speaking to you today as a concerned private citizen, a mother, a retired public school teacher and the Volunteer Education Lead in Central Ohio for Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. I was born and raised in the Youngstown area and attended Bowling Green State University for my undergrad work. My graduate work was done at The Ohio State University and Otterbein University. As an adult, I have lived and worked in the Cleveland and Columbus areas. I've spent my entire life in Ohio.

This bill would drastically reduce the training requirements under current state law for armed school employees, from 728 hours of OPOTA training to the 8 hours required for CCW permits (some of which may be completed online). I am opposed to arming teachers, and certainly opposed to armed teachers having *less* training than currently required—let alone over 700 hours less.

I think about an armed teacher in practical terms. What would this look like in my classroom? A gun located in another room that I had to retrieve, as I heard in proponent testimony, does not seem like a practical solution, if you want me to protect my classroom. Leaving students alone in a classroom in an active shooter situation does not seem like a safe decision. I would have to have the gun on me at all times to be effective as a means of protecting my kids. If someone who is armed enters a classroom, it seems likely that I would be the target, shot first with no opportunity to use the gun to protect my students. And if I'm not shot immediately, we have two armed shooters in the classroom. Who gets hurt in that crossfire? That's what I imagine transpiring. But, as a teacher, I'm data based when I make my decisions, so I did what so many of us do when conducting

research.

I turned to Google. I searched for studies and research that would support arming teachers with limited training. Some of the organizations that I learned oppose this approach to school safety are the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, the National Association of School Resource Officers, and the Major Cities Chief Association (which represents 75 large cities in the United States and Canada). I learned that the National Association of School Resource Officers states that armed teachers are a risk to law enforcement, students, school community members and the armed teachers themselves (National Association of School Resource Officers, nasro.org/faq/). J. Thomas Manger, then the president of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, said in 2018 that, “The more guns that are coming into the equation, the more volatility and the more risk there is of somebody getting hurt” (America’s Police Call BS on Arming Teachers, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/03/police-chiefs-c-all-bullshit-on-arming-teachers-sandy-hook-parkland-columbine/>). In a 2018 National Education Association survey of 1000 members, 74% of teachers opposed arming teachers (“NEA Survey: Educators Say No to Arming Teachers, Favor Real Solutions to Gun Violence,” NEA Today, Tim Walker, March 13th, 2018). In a poll of 497 teachers conducted by Gallup in March of 2018, 73% said they are opposed to arming teachers and other staff in school buildings (Megan Brenan, “Most U.S. Teachers Oppose Carrying Guns in Schools” (Gallup, March 16, 2018), <https://bit.ly/2MPTRV5>).

In addition, I learned that schools that arm teachers face liability issues. United Educators specializes in insuring schools. Joe Carter, vice president, stated that he hears concerns from insurance executives that they will be asked to cover schools who arm teachers. “I don’t know anyone out there who is ready to offer liability coverage for schools when they’re arming their teachers,” Carter said (Washington Post, “One Road Block to Arming Teachers: Insurance Companies,” Todd C. Frankel, March, 2018).

But during my research, what I kept noticing was the same recurring advice on how to prevent school shootings, and not once did anyone say the solution is more guns. Rutgers Graduate School of Education Professor Matthew Mayer says that schools should develop and maintain a positive school climate (“Gun violence: Rutgers expert tells us how to reduce it,” Asbury Park Press, March 15, 2018.)

In “Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America”

("Call For Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America," Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence, education.virginia.edu/prevent-gun-violence, University of Virginia, February 2018), two hundred universities, national mental health groups, school districts and thousands of individual experts agreed with the idea that we need to change our mindset from reaction to prevention. Create a school climate that does not accept bullying and discrimination, provide adequate staffing of counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, and establish and train school and community-based threat assessment teams to provide interventions for those in need.

A Secret Service report found that 100% of school attackers exhibited warning signs before the attack. Attackers make plans and talk about them. How often have we heard, after a school shooting, "I never thought he/she would really do it"? ("A Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, United States Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center, Lina Alathari, Ph.D. Chief, 2019)

Research from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (2020) also recommends that schools prioritize ("Gun Violence:Facts and Statistics," Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Center for Violence Prevention, December 2020.)creating a supportive school environment, decreasing isolation for students, and closing the gaps in mental health services.

On the first day of school in 2012 at Perry Hall School in Nottingham, Maryland, a student, armed with a 16-gauge shotgun, pulled the trigger and injured a classmate. Jesse Wasmer, a guidance counselor, tackled the student, stopping the attack. Mr. Wasmer said, "Never have I thought, 'I wish I had a gun.' What we need is more caring adults in these kids' lives, not more guns." ("Gun Violence:Fighting for Our Lives and Our Rights," books.google.com, Matt Doeden, 2019)

I am here today to say let's do the hard work of really solving the problem of gun violence in our schools. The experts tell us the solution is not more guns. There is no amount of training that makes it safe for teachers to carry guns in schools. This bill would worsen an already-dangerous situation by gutting the over 700 hours of training Ohio law currently requires and allowing teachers to carry guns in schools without extensive safety training.

Children need to feel cared about, supported, they need to have a purpose and control over their lives. Let's really solve the problem of school violence by creating a safe climate for all kids, in their schools and their neighborhoods. Our kids are worth it.

I'd be happy to answer any questions.