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Before I begin, thank you to Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and the members of the committee for taking the time to hear my testimony. It is exercises like these that allow the people to make their voice heard and uphold the underpinnings of our democracy.

As you well know, we are in the midst of a pandemic, with the COVID-19 cases in Ohio recently passing 1 million. Ohioans are not only concerned with not contracting COVID-19, but also are struggling to pay their bills. Ohioans are returning to an important part of daily life: school.

For teachers, this year is unlike any other; for, teachers must plan how to most effectively teach students while dealing with new and unprecedented obstacles. **Having firearms in the classrooms should not be something teachers should be planning for anytime, but especially not now.**

Under current Ohio law, all armed school employees—including teachers, security guards, and special police—must either complete an approved basic peace officer training course, which is about 728 hours, or have completed **20 years** of active duty as a peace officer. House Bill 99 **throws those requirements out the window** by exempting teachers from these requirements and allows school districts to employ armed personnel in schools with **as little as 8 hours of training to no training, depending on whether or not the firearm is concealed.** Going from **728 hours to 0-8 hours of training** and Having untrained teachers with firearms is **not** the answer to keeping students safe in schools.

Not only is arming teachers unsafe, especially due to the possibility of a student getting their hands on the firearm if it isn't stored properly and harming themselves or others, it is opposed by teachers, with The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association speaking out against it<sup>1</sup>, so does The National Association of School Resource Officers.<sup>2</sup>

Even more worrisome is the potential for both intentional and unintentional shootings that can happen. In fact, both intentional and unintentional shootings have occurred in the past: “[a] janitor who killed two of his colleagues at a performing arts school in Florida[,]... [a] Spanish teacher who was fired and then returned to school with an AK-47 in a guitar case that he used to kill the school headmaster and then himself [,]... [f]irearm suicides by faculty or staff at schools [,and]...[u]nintentional incidents, by both school resource officers in schools and

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<sup>1</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety. Keeping our kids safe at school: a plan to stop mass shootings and end gun violence in American schools. [everytownresearch.org/schoolsafety](https://everytownresearch.org/schoolsafety). February 2019.

<sup>2</sup> National Association of School Resource Officers. NASRO opposes arming teachers. <https://nasro.org/news/press-releases/nasro-opposesarming-teachers/>. Published February 2018.

teachers who accidentally discharged their firearms.”<sup>3</sup> **Again, firearms do not belong in schools.**

In the past, I have used my home state of Florida as a cautionary tale regarding dangerous gun legislation. Following the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Florida lawmakers passed a Guardian program that gave counties the option to arm teachers and staff. As expected, some of the people who were let into the program were not fit to be the deciders of life and death if a shooting were to occur on school grounds. These included “a school Guardian was arrested for domestic battery and false imprisonment after he held a woman against her will in an apartment and pushed her as she attempted to leave. During the investigation, it was discovered that he had pawned the gun, body armor, and magazines he was issued by the Guardian program[,]... a Guardian [who] was arrested after he pawned his issued firearm multiple times[, and a]... school Guardian [who] was fired after a series of conspiracy-laden social media posts surfaced, including one that included a depiction of a law enforcement officer’s SWAT helmet with a bullet hole.”<sup>4</sup>

In Florida, Guardians have to complete a minimum of 144 hours of training, and pass drug and psychological examinations,<sup>5</sup> but despite those requirements, these unfit individuals **still became Guardians**. If unfit individuals are able to become Guardians in Florida, even after going through 144 hours of training and examinations, imagine what would happen if SB 317 allowed individuals to be armed with **little to no training?**

Instead of passing dangerous gun legislation, Ohio should lead by example by passing legislation that is proven to make Ohioans **safer**. These include requiring a background check on every gun sale, and establishing a strong red flag law. For schools, the COVID-19 pandemic is stressful enough. Schools **do not** need the added stress and liability of having armed teachers with little or no training. **I highly urge you all to vote against House Bill 99.**

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<sup>3</sup> [https://everytownresearch.org/arming-teachers-introduces-new-risks-into-schools/#foot\\_note\\_anchor\\_2](https://everytownresearch.org/arming-teachers-introduces-new-risks-into-schools/#foot_note_anchor_2)

<sup>4</sup>

<https://everytownresearch.org/report/a-plan-for-preventing-mass-shootings-and-ending-all-gun-violence-in-american-schools/#arming-teachers-is-dangerous>

<sup>5</sup>

<http://www.fldoe.org/safe-schools/guardian-program.stml#:~:text=Guardians%20must%20pass%20psychological%20and,of%20144%20hours%20of%20training.&text=State%20funds%20are%20granted%20to,for%20serving%20in%20the%20program.>