

HB 99 Opposition Testimony
House Government Criminal Justice Committee
November 2, 2021

Submitted by:
Connie Bunnell Griffis

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 99. My name is Connie Bunnell Griffis. I am a retired Intervention Specialist and have an M Ed in School Counseling and Special Education. I am a 34 year resident of Madison Township in Butler County. We moved to Madison so that my sons could go to Madison Local Schools and we were VERY HAPPY with that decision. Madison was the last place I would have expected to have a school shooting incident. BUT WE DID!

It was terrible! Two students wounded. Teachers, students, parents, community, everybody upset. But it could have been so much worse if it hadn't been for an SRO (School Resource Officer) who responded within seconds to shots fired. BUT out of this terrible incident came a most important question: How do we keep our kids safe? AND then came the quickest, riskiest, and most seductive WRONG answer — more guns in the school, ARM THE TEACHERS.

Arming teachers is based on the faulty reasoning that armed teachers are a deterrent. But most school shooters are psychologically unstable adolescents, who also may be suicidal. These students may see an armed teacher as an ENTICEMENT or CHALLENGE. So, arming teachers ONLY increases the danger to students and staff. AND an armed teacher can not, in a moment of duress and confusion, be expected to perform like a special trained law enforcement officer. An armed teacher is MUCH more likely to shoot a student bystander, or be shot by responding law enforcement than to be an effective solution for an active shooter in a school.

Research strongly supports that when guns are around, CHILDREN WILL ACCESS THEM. There have been many incidents (mostly in Texas, by the way) where guns in schools were misplaced or carelessly left. Guns have been left in restrooms, in locker rooms, at ballgames and other sports. Specific incidents include an assistant principal who left her Glock in a restroom. It was turned in by a 5th grade girl. Another includes a teacher's gun falling to the ground when he did a back flip. An SRO dropped his gun in a classroom and IT FIRED. Fortunately, it was after school in an empty classroom. Most recently, two 3rd graders took a gun from a desk belonging to a transportation director. The little girl held up the gun, aimed it at the little boy and proclaimed, "You're under arrest!!" None of these incidents resulted in harm to a child, thank goodness, but, as long as teachers go armed at school, catastrophic incidents are going to happen.

As a side note, multiple professional organizations have come out against allowing teachers to go armed while on duty: American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, Organization of School administrators, Ohio Education Association, the Association of School Resource Officers, American Pediatric Physicians, and emergency room physicians. Also the League of Women Voters in Ohio has been recently studying and holding meetings about this and is expected to issue a decision in opposition of arming teachers.

In spite of all this, Madison Board of Education had their answer. They jumped at the idea of arming teachers with no research and without any community discussion. In fact, they did not even discuss this idea with their professional staff. They charged ahead, creating a Firearms Authorization Policy, in violation of the Open Meetings Act.

As people in the community began to protest this dangerous policy of arming teachers, the BOE dug in their heels. My friend was escorted from a board meeting by the deputy sheriff at the direction of board president Dave French. At this point it was no longer about: How do we keep our kids safe? It became about “right fighting”, partisanship, and, unfortunately, necessary litigation. HOW SAD!

As a retired teacher, the very idea of armed teachers is anathema to me. Putting aside the danger, personally, I can not / will not try to talk to someone with a firearm — and I’m an adult. The presence of a weapon profoundly hinders conversation. Students at Madison report that they know which teachers are carrying. That has to have a major effect on rapport, and on approachability with a teacher. A teacher from Middletown High School told me that she did an informal survey of her students asking what they think of the idea of armed teachers. The vast majority were adamantly against it, and many of her students of color reported that they would no longer be attending school if teachers were armed.

I don’t understand why we’re here again, after an overwhelming response against this very same bill, starting as SB 317 last year, AND after Madison Local Schools lost in a decision at the Ohio Supreme Court in the case Gabbard v. Madison Local School Dist. Bd. HB 99 is a rehash of SB 317 sponsored by Senator Coley. Only Rep Hall (HB 99 sponsor) has apparently added training requirements that were dictated by Buckeye Firearms Faster training. The fact is that the more guns are in schools, the greater the danger.

Please oppose HB 99. It is very dangerous to allow teachers to go armed at school.

Respectfully submitted,

Connie Bunnell Griffis