

Testimony on House Bill 99  
Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:  
Deborah Cooper

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.

I am an Ohio resident and voter and a former teacher who has taught at all levels from kindergarten through 12th grade, as both a full-time and a substitute teacher.

Not only can I not imagine how arming teachers would make students safer, but I'm shocked that Ohio legislators would even consider a bill like HB 99.

Bills calling to arm persons with insufficient training continue to show up in both houses of our legislature, despite research which makes clear that the less children are exposed to guns, the safer they are. I hope you would agree we all want to protect children, so rather than listen to the extreme gun lobby, which is financially motivated to urge passage of this bill, please look at what data tells us: criminal background checks, red flag laws, safe storage laws, additional physical security upgrades, emergency plans among staff and access to school mental health professionals are the ways to increase safety in schools.

<https://everytownresearch.org/reports/keeping-our-schools-safe-a-plan-to-stop-mass-shootings-and-end-all-gun-violence-in-american-schools/>

According to a July 2015 report conducted by Mount St. Mary's University and the National Gun Victims Action Council, "If you're going to rely on a gun for self-defense, you should know how to handle and use it." The report adds that "safe and effective firearms usage requires mental preparation; legal knowledge; judgmental awareness; as well as firearm expertise, skill and familiarity." We know that hitting a target, (most likely a current or former student, as research shows), and the chaos that transpires with an active shooter in a classroom is something we should never expect a teacher or any other "authorized person" to do. But setting them up with 18 hours of education and two hours of live fire training is completely insufficient. It will never keep students safe but will certainly add to the body count.

My son is a special education teacher, and his children are elementary students. I do not want my son to teach in any school that allows teachers to be armed (particularly without training or with inadequate training), nor do I want my grandchildren to attend such a school. I certainly would not teach in a school district that put such a low premium on student and staff safety.

Teachers understand that kids of all ages are impulsive and frequently do not consider the consequences of their actions. A teacher would need many more than one pair of eyes to monitor everything that happens in a classroom on a good day. What if a student gains access to a teacher's gun? And how can parents be sure that an untrained teacher, making a split-second decision, won't shoot one of their children by mistake?

Young people depend on adults to exercise restraint and wisdom. When adults fail to consider the ramifications of the decisions they make, children suffer. We are currently traumatizing children

with “shooter drills” while ignoring the elephant in the room – the greater likelihood that the shooter will *not* be an outsider, but rather a student, or even a teacher, who reacts impulsively out of fear or simply fires a weapon by accident. To ignore such real possibilities is irresponsible.

The General Assembly states in HB99 “that the purpose of the provisions is to expressly overrule the decision of the Ohio Supreme Court in *Gabbard v. Madison Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.* (R.C. 109.78(E)). This is very troubling. Please give this legislation the priority it deserves. Playing politics with the lives of Ohio’s school children will lead to tragedy.

For the sake of Ohio students and teachers, I urge you to vote no on HB 99.

Deborah Cooper