

Erin Gabbard HB 99 Testimony
November 4, 2021

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and other members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for considering my testimony. My name is Erin Gabbard. I am the proud mother of two children in the Madison Local School District. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and I offer them in opposition to Sub. HB99.

HB99's proposed modifications to Revised Code section 109.78 would authorize local school boards to allow school employees to carry loaded firearms on school grounds with 70% less training than the state currently requires. This does not protect our children, it endangers them. Allowing teachers to go armed with our children at school with just 20 hours of initial training is woefully inadequate. It makes our children less safe.

I want safe and common-sense solutions for protecting our children in school. I want to believe that we all want that. I have tried to understand why anyone would consider a bill to lower training requirements to arm school staff (especially to just 20 hours) and keep coming back to the same questions: Who does this bill protect? Who does this bill serve? Why can't we guarantee to all Ohio's children that anyone carrying a gun in school has enough training to keep them safe?

HB99 doesn't protect our children and our teachers. It puts them at additional risk. You don't need to take my word for it -- just ask the Ohio Education Association and the Ohio Federation of Teachers—they recently filed a brief in support of the parents in the lawsuit against Madison Local School district. So did more than 250 Ohio teachers. So did the Ohio Fraternal Order of Police, and a group of firearms training experts including the Dayton Police Chief and the Commander of the Columbus Division of Police Training Bureau. They all asked the Court to uphold rigorous state-sanctioned training for armed staff and warned of the dangers if school boards are given free rein to ignore these requirements, and arm staff with little training. In June of this year, the Ohio Supreme Court agreed that schools cannot arm teachers without proper training.

Let me put it more plainly. The first sentence of the Ohio Statehouse Security FAQs states that “...**with the exception of those carried by peace officers** in the course of their duties and as expressly authorized under division (N) of section 105.41 of the Revised Code, **firearms or other weapons, concealed or otherwise, are prohibited within the capitol building...**” You are putting our children at risk, risks that you as lawmakers will not even take.

I often think about the shooting that occurred in our school in 2016. It happened during lunchtime in a full cafeteria. Children were screaming and running everywhere. There was pandemonium. Do we really expect a teacher with so little training to be able to use their weapon in a way that doesn't harm the students it proclaims to protect, as they run for their lives in and out of sightlines? If our staff members had been armed in 2016, how much more blood would've been shed because of lack of training? Are you willing to take the same risks you're asking our children to take?

Who does this bill protect? Who does this bill serve? Why do you trust local school boards to make safety decisions when they're not safety experts? Would you want your child in a school around armed staff with the weapon they carry daily and only 30% of the training that the state currently requires? Please ask yourself these questions, and I hope you'll answer honestly.

If you are a proponent of keeping our children safe in our schools, you must develop comprehensive legislation that requires rigorous initial training, annual rigorous training, and testing that includes de-escalation tactics, psychological evaluations, and routine independent assessments for armed staff. If you are a proponent of keeping our children safe in school, rather than *prohibiting* OPATA from developing a training of more than 20 hours (which is what this Sub. Bill does), you would leave it to the experts to decide how much training is appropriate. **All we're asking is for you to protect our children the same way you protect yourselves.** This bill does none of that. This bill is not about protecting our children. If you are concerned with the safety of our students in Ohio schools, you must vote no on this bill.