

Testimony on House Bill 99
House Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:
Robin Hawkins

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony in opposition to House Bill 99. I am writing to you today as a concerned Ohio resident of 35 years, a former Ohio elementary school teacher, the mother of four Ohio adults including an active duty Ohio police lieutenant, and the grandmother of six Ohio children with 5 of 6 in Ohio schools.

As the title of the bill indicates, “Regards persons authorized to go armed within school safety zone,” this bill would provide direction and baseline requirements for our state so that individual school boards have a state standard they must meet in every facet of this authorization to go armed in school safety zones. Although attempts have been made to improve the original bill by adding some additional training, the minimum is to be set unacceptably low. Law enforcement officers find confronting an active shooter to be extremely dangerous and even with **hundreds of hours of training** innocent bystanders are at risk.

Local school boards are required to submit safety plans to the state of Ohio because the state of Ohio has the duty to provide and ultimate responsibility for all Ohio school children’s safety. State standards are required for many areas of safety training, including tornado drills, school bus drivers’ licensing and criminal history record checks, all to keep Ohio children safe.

*The decision to allow personnel to be armed in school MUST continue to specify adequate consistent minimal requirements for the screening, initial and ongoing training and initial and ongoing proficiency of armed persons in school safety zones. **Even though the number of training hours has been increased in this version of HB99, it is still inadequate with no data from experts in law enforcement that supports this training.***

Proponents of HB 99 argue that Concealed Carry permit holders already have permission from the state to be armed in *most* places and that it is unfair to require more from those in *school safety zones*. This notion is absurd. Ohioans have the right to expect Ohio laws to protect our most vulnerable citizens including but not limited to children in schools, people in hospitals, nursing homes and churches as well as those in courthouses and statehouses.

What is *not* fair is to allow local school board members to secretly designate anyone or any number of persons *they choose* to be armed and *not* require state-mandated

ongoing certification and training and transparency so that local parents and voters can determine whether the local school board members are competent and whether their local school board members are representing the people whom they have been elected to serve. Ohioans deserve better.

Training

The argument has been made by proponents of the bill that the current standard of 20 years of active duty as a police officer or the 700 plus hours for Ohio Peace officer training is too high and includes superfluous training for areas like “high-speed driving, police photography and commercial vehicle law.” A proposal to review the particulars of this training to substitute school-appropriate education, skills and training would be a reasonable request. Not mentioned by the bill’s proponents but importantly, School Resource Officers are trained specifically for school duty in areas like non-lethal use of force, strategies for de-escalating conflict, identifying potentially at-risk students and strategies for appropriate intervention.

Proponents of HB 99 seem to agree with the FOP’s assertion in their amicus brief for the Ohio Supreme Court case regarding Madison Local schools that without extensive training, teachers and other personnel will be “**unable to suppress the inevitable adrenaline fueled stress that impairs fine motor skills and peripheral vision.**” The FOP amicus brief goes on to describe the all too likely scene from hell that ensues as bullets strike unintended persons and objects, screaming children run through the halls and even as professional law enforcement arrives the potential for harm continues to escalate as law enforcement may not be able to distinguish the designated armed personnel from the shooter.

Proponent testimony agreed that responding adequately and appropriately to an active shooter would **require tremendous training**, not just in accurate marksmanship (which Sergeant Spicer points out is a “perishable skill”) as important as that initial and ongoing certification would be, but even more importantly, rigorous initial **and ongoing scenario training to** demonstrate the ability to perform under severe pressure and circumstances that require more than basic good judgment.

The minimal training necessary to adequately prepare for an armed confrontation where hundreds of innocent lives are at stake is **not a one-time event**. My son and every police officer **must demonstrate proficiency** with his firearm **4 times/year** and they **are required to participate successfully in ongoing scenario training** to protect the public in a variety of “active shooter situations” so that the **officers can practice and learn how to best protect bystanders**. This practice is necessary even for seasoned officers as it presents them with multiple simulated life-threatening encounters and the often negative and unanticipated consequences of action choices **without endangering anyone. This remote preparation helps them remain calm and to act appropriately in real crises. The training specified here is inadequate.**

We expect our teachers to become knowledgeable experts in their field and to maintain their expertise with ongoing education. Expecting them to put on body armor and become SWAT team ready would be ridiculous if it were not so frightening.

Even in a situation where a teacher has the appropriate live-shooting training, this *presumes that individual has the mental/emotional ability to adequately assess and safely engage as an armed defender and can shift their focus and role, without harming those they are attempting to protect.* **No research supports this ridiculous idea and those who serve in law enforcement and the military dispute it.**

Guns in Schools

The presence of a weapon in school safety zones introduces all its own potential tragedies as **any loaded weapon could be inadvertently discharged** (this has happened even with law enforcement officers) or even more likely, **stolen**. Sergeant Spicer noted that in many schools the weapons and armor are kept in a central locked location. While that sounds better to me than having people armed with concealed weapons (which could be unintentionally fired and/or taken from them) in classrooms and hallways but leaves me wondering who is supervising and responsible for the students in his plan when their teacher leaves them to respond to an emergency? More guns in schools = more potential for gun catastrophes.

I am not relying on my own thoughts and feelings for this assessment. The President and Executive Director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, which represents 75 police forces from large cities in the USA and Canada, both agree that arming teachers is *“not a good idea”* * and say, *“The more guns that are coming into the equation, the more volatility and the more risk there is of somebody getting hurt.”**** Those who provide the insurance for schools agree by either refusing to provide this type of protection for schools that arm teachers or making such insurance prohibitively and appropriately expensive***.

There is plenty of evidence based research on how to make schools safer and arming teachers is not only on the list but makes schools less safe.

To make schools safer, research shows we must adopt an evidence-based intervention plan like the one proposed by Everytown, The American Federation of Teachers, and The National Education Association.

These plans focus on intervening BEFORE potential situations develop by keeping guns out of the hands of children, teens, and adults whose mental state or criminal status should preclude their access to firearms. Extreme risk laws, responsible firearm storage laws that prevent unauthorized access, raising the age to purchase semiautomatic firearms to 21, and requiring background checks on ALL gun sales are all demonstrated ways to help prevent gun violence.

Additionally, there are evidence-based and expert-endorsed actions that schools can take to intervene and address warning signs of violence and to keep shooters out of schools by establishing threat assessment programs, implementing basic security upgrades like access control measures and interior door locks, emergency planning that facilitates communication among school personnel and with law enforcement, and promoting more equitable schools.

The training required to obtain a Concealed Carry Permit is clearly inadequate and insufficient for school safety zones with as little as 8 hours of training, most (6 hours) online and only 2 hours in person. As was also mentioned in the proponent testimony, *insurance companies who are professionals at assessing risks to determine an acceptable level of potential liability require more training for personnel armed in schools*. Sergeant Spicer did not specify what the increased costs of the insurance are but it is worth noting that this bill's seeming attempt to "save money" by requiring less training has hidden and unacceptable costs and risks. Ohio school children and personnel, Ohio law enforcement and all of us who have loved ones entrusted to our schools' care deserve better protection than this shabby bill provides.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify. Providing excellence in education for all our Ohio children, beginning with essentials like their personal safety is vitally important. We expect our elected officials to lead the way with solutions that are **evidence-based and carefully considered**. Removing the protection current law provides schools is irresponsible and reckless. Please do not allow this to happen.

Sincerely,

Robin Hawkins

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