

Testimony on House Bill 99 House

Criminal Justice Committee

November 4, 2021

Submitted by: Susanne Lane

Chair LaRue, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to House Bill 99. My name is Susanne Lane and I am writing to you today as a first grade teacher with 24 years of experience. I oppose this bill because we know that arming our teachers will not make children safer; in fact, it increases the chances that a teacher's gun will fall into the wrong hands, or that a gun will discharge unintentionally and injure a student.

As many parents have discovered during Ohio's stay at home orders, teaching is not for the faint of heart, and educators manage to accomplish it with too many students and not enough resources. As teachers we wear many hats, educator, counselor, nurse, disciplinarian, the list goes on. Experts say that teachers make over 1500 decisions every single day. What educators do not need is another hat to wear, another decision to make, one more responsibility.

73 percent of US teachers oppose arming school staff. Arming teachers is opposed by school safety experts, parents, and students, and with good reason. Students, especially students of color, feel less safe in schools where teachers are armed. Research has found that increasing armed presence in school is associated with an increase in middle school discipline rates, a decrease in high school graduation rates, and a decrease in college enrollment; and these effects were largest for students who were Black. In districts with armed staff, we have seen guns left in bathrooms, locker rooms, at sporting events, and even an incident where a gun fell out while a teacher did a backflip. Many misplaced guns have later been found in the hands of students. Guns have been stolen from teachers by students and there have been multiple incidents where school resource officers and teachers unintentionally discharged their firearms.

The best way to protect American schools from gun violence is to adopt an evidence based intervention plan that is endorsed by the two largest teachers' unions. These plans include extreme risk laws that empower family members to act when they see warning signs, responsible firearm storage laws to address the most common source of guns used in school violence, raising the age to purchase firearms, and requiring background checks on all gun sales. Plans should include threat assessment programs, security upgrades, emergency planning, and making sure schools are safe and equitable.

Lastly, even with the extensive training that is required of police officers, their ability to shoot accurately significantly decreases in gunfights. Research from the New York City Police Department, some of the most highly trained law enforcement in the country, saw their shooting accuracy in a gunfight decrease to as low as 18 percent. With less training and experience, what does a reasonable person expect to have happen? When a teacher misses their intended target which innocent student will be the victim?

Allowing school staff to carry firearms in schools is dangerous. Allowing this to happen without extensive and ongoing training is irresponsible.