

November 2, 2021

Thank you Chairman LaRe, Vice-chair Swearingen, Ranking member Leland, and all members of the Criminal Justice committee. My name is Jeff Prenger and I am from Russia, OH. My wife, Hollie, and I have six children, I work in an executive management role at a manufacturing company, I teach religion classes, I coach youth sports, and I am the current President of the Board of Education of Russia Local School. I do not own a gun.

I am here today to advocate for your passing of HB 99, whereas the Ohio Revised Code shall be amended to expressly exempt persons authorized to be armed within a school safety zone from a requirement that peace officer basic training be obtained. It is important to note that this bill is not about the second amendment, gun advocacy, or gun control. As well, it is not about whether or not there can be armed persons within a school safety zone, the Ohio Revised Code unequivocally allows for this and this was not changed by the Ohio Supreme Court ruling in the case *Gabbard v. Madison Local School District Board of Education*. Finally, this bill is not about who can be armed in school safety zones and the Ohio Supreme Court ruling did not change this either. Rather, this bill is expressly and solely about the training requirements for those who are authorized to be armed in a school safety zone.

Russia is a small, rural village located in southwest Shelby County. We have a school, church, post office, park, library, fire department, grocery store, two restaurants, and a few small manufacturing and service businesses. We do not have any stoplights and we do not have a police department. We contract our law enforcement to the Shelby County Sheriff's Office and they are to be commended for a job that is always well done, at all hours of the day and night, and I thank them for their dedication and hard work in helping to make Russia a safe and wonderful place to live.

Our district has one school, on one campus, and in one building for the entire K-12 grades. Our current enrollment across all thirteen grades is 412 students and we generally graduate class sizes in the low 30's. Our district is small by all standards. In contrast, I believe the largest school district in Ohio is the Columbus City School District, with more than 50,000 students and more than 120 schools. Of course, there are districts of all sizes in between, but the point is that each district is extremely unique. The boards, administrations, staffs, teachers, students, facilities, and financials are different from district to district. No two districts are alike. At Russia, most of our staff, faculty, administration, and school board have been life-long or long term residents of this community and have an intimate knowledge of the district's unique assets and needs. As such, we remain strong in our commitment to retain local control over the educational, moral, and physical safety needs of our students. Local control has always been a key factor to our success, and this is arguably the case for most districts.

Russia School is a great place to grow and learn and we are committed to live by our motto that our children always come first. That said, we are not exempt from the risk of tragic human events like the shootings that occurred in Chardon, OH in Feb 2012 at Chardon High School where three young teens died or like the shootings that occurred in Newtown, CT in Dec 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary where six teachers and 20 children were killed. In 2013, our local Board of Education and administration took action and developed a detailed emergency response plan should we ever be faced with the unthinkable, an active shooter on campus.

As mentioned, our village does not have a police department and so 911 emergency response time can be up to twenty minutes, this is a lifetime in an active shooter situation. Therefore, it was clear from the beginning that our emergency response plan would need to include armed response measures. While the emergency response plan is multi-layered and has many facets, I will provide a short overview of the armed response portion of the plan.

The armed response team is voluntary and requires individual board approval based on prerequisites of a concealed carry license, 30+ hours of intense training that includes 1,000 practice rounds at the range, emergency medical training, active shooter scenario training, and specific active scenario training in our own school building. Each armed response team member must be able to pass a shooting skills test that includes 25 still shots and three moving shots. The trainee must achieve a minimum accuracy score of 26 of 28 shots. This score is substantially higher than what is currently required by the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy, where the minimum passing score is 20 of 25 shots, none of which are moving shots. Each member of the armed response team must complete annual refresher training with the Shelby County Sheriff's Office and repass a shooting accuracy score equivalent to the peace officer academy standard. The plan also provides opportunities for 24 hours of additional intense training as previously described, but at a higher level. In addition, all staff complete a training regimen that includes practical application of firearms, civilian active shooter response with a trauma-informed approach, and trauma care training.

On a side note, Russia School worked cooperatively with the Sheriff's Office, legal counsel, and the community to develop the plan and once it was approved at the board level, Russia School notified the community of the policy. Our armed response plan is only a last resort if someone comes to our campus to harm our students or teachers. Our armed response team members are not police officers but are highly trained in one specific aspect of policing and that is to stop an active shooter on our campus. Police officers may serve to stop an active shooter as well, but they also serve in a much broader field of roles. Our school and community are very grateful to all police officers for their work, they are true patriots, and we owe them sincere gratitude for the work they do.

While we continually assess our emergency response plan, we feel our school does not need a police officer, security guard, or resource officer on staff. From the safety side, we feel we have a very solid armed response plan already in place. From the financial side, the estimated annual cost for a police officer on site is \$75,000, and this does not work for us. Again, each district is different and there are a lot of variables that are rolled into a workable safety and financial plan.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court's Ruling in *Gabbard v. Madison Local SD*, has effectively changed the training requirements for armed school employees, and so our armed response team at Russia can no longer legally function as it did. In the event of the unthinkable, we are in a riskier position for a tragic ending than we were prior to the ruling, and this is tragic in and of itself.

As the Ohio Revised Code currently stands, armed school employees are now required to have basic peace officer training, which amounts to 700+ hours of training, an overwhelming and monumental task for most current school employees. And for what? Please reference Exhibit A attached, "Ohio Peace Officer Basic Training Audit Sheet". Over 500 hours of basic peace officer training are related to administration, legal, human relations, driving, patrol, civil disorders, traffic, investigation, and homeland security topics, none of which apply to firearms in a school safety zone. I do believe that basic peace officer training is good for that broad scoped profession. However, at least 75% of basic peace officer training has nothing to do with firearms, high stress situations, trauma, or first aid.

As I said in my opening, HB 99 is expressly and solely about the training requirements for those who are authorized to be armed in a school safety zone. So, the question then bares, is basic peace officer training the right training for someone to be armed in a school safety zone? Please don't let this stand. I'm asking you to pass HB 99 so that local boards and administrations can develop a plan that best works for their school and their community.

Thank you for your time and consideration and thank you all for your service to the State of Ohio. I will now take any questions.

Jeff Prenger
President
Russia Local Board of Education