

House Criminal Justice Committee
Opposition Testimony Sub Bill HB 99
Arming Persons in Schools
Submitted by: Ikeshia Smith
Nov. 2, 2021

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. My name is Ikeshia Smith, and I strongly oppose HB 99.

Working closely with children and families in the social service/mental health field over the past 11 years allows me to see their vulnerabilities and unique stressors that impact them within their micro and macro systems. When families and children experience stressors, studies have shown they are susceptible to mental health challenges. One of the most unique stressors that have impacted many children and families found in research is firearm mortality. While most firearm mortalities occur within the community, allowing guns in a learning environment, may create an opportunity for more firearm mortality to occur, regardless of an individual's training or skill. For that, I oppose HB 99.

Additionally, students who experience many emotional, social, neurological, and psychological difficulties tend to express them through externalizing behaviors which may include physical/verbal outbursts, resistance, risky behaviors, or isolation. Research supports that many of these challenges can be remedied by students gaining more support from nurturing and supportive adults/parents to help build their emotional intelligence and reduce their maladaptive behaviors. Furthermore, children tend to model the behaviors that are demonstrated by the adults in their day-to-day lives. If children were to witness an adult carry a gun in one of their most sacred environments, this may give children the perception that conflict resolution is solved with the utilization of firearms rather than building a culture of effective and strategic coping mechanisms that lead to a safe and healthy lifestyle.

This is an urgent call from mental health professionals who work with children and families that are impacted by firearm mortality. Please vote NO on HB 99.

Thank you for your attention on this matter!

Ikeshia Smith