



Indian Valley Local Schools

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House Bill 99 Testimony (Proponent)

IRA WENTWORTH

Superintendent

Indian Valley Local Schools

November 3, 2021

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and all members of the Criminal Justice Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today.

My name is Ira Wentworth and I am honored to be superintendent for the Indian Valley Local School District in Tuscarawas County. This is my 28th year in education and 20th as a school administrator. I have served the Indian Valley community for the past 15 years, with the most recent 9 years in the superintendent's seat.

Indian Valley is a rural school district that serves the villages and surrounding areas of Gnadenhutten, Midvale, Port Washington, and Tuscarawas. The families of our community care deeply about their children and take pride in the tradition of high academic achievement demonstrated by their school system. It is for those reasons I stand before you today: Indian Valley is a rural district; we have schools in four villages sprinkled across 125 square miles; and our families care deeply for their children.

During the 2016-2017 school year, our Board of Education focused on improving school safety. They examined the cost of hiring an adequate number of School Resource Officers to cover the configuration of our school district. As that was cost prohibitive, they began considering authorizing select staff members to conceal and carry on school grounds. The Board was very open and public with their consideration of arming staff. If the community was not comfortable with the idea, they wanted to know before going too far down that path. However, during this time of very public discussion neither the Board nor I received one negative comment. Not one. Our community was clearly supportive of the safety measure.

Moving forward, the Board adopted policies and procedures that went above and beyond the requirements of R.C. 2923.122. We fully implemented the armed staff program

beginning with the 2017-2018 school year and continued until the recent 4-3 Ohio Supreme Court ruling which now prohibits that aspect of our school safety plan.

I am here today to ask you to move forward with proposed HB 99 so the Indian Valley Board of Education, and other school boards around the great state of Ohio, can decide for themselves the best measures to keep their students and staff safe based upon what works for their own communities.

Consider this scenario. Lord forbid we have an active killer enter one of our school buildings. Yes, we practice lockdowns and evacuations to save lives. However, the response time for law enforcement is an issue that could cost lives. As a 125 square mile rural school district, there is vast disparity in response times. Consider these dynamics

School Building*	Village	Daytime Village Police on Duty	Miles/Time** from Sheriff's Office
Indian Valley High	Gnadenhutten	One Full Time	11 miles / 14 minutes
Indian Valley Middle	Tuscarawas	One Part Time	5 miles / 8 minutes
Midvale Elementary	Midvale	One Full Time	2 miles / 3 minutes
Port Was. Elementary	Port Washington	None	13 miles / 17 minutes

* There are approximately 450 students and 40 in each school building.

** Google Maps used for mileage and time.

In closing, I ask for your trust. Trust the locally elected officials to do their jobs and govern on behalf of the people who elected them and put them in their positions. Trust that they care for the safety and well being of their students and staff. Trust that they will be diligent to institute checks and balances that do not put innocent people at risk. The school boards and those staff members who are selected and volunteer to conceal and carry are not the bad guys; they are the good guys wanting to protect others from the bad guys. Put your trust in the good guys.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.



Dr. Ira Wentworth