

Testimony on House Bill 99
Criminal Justice Committee
Date: November 2, 2021

Submitted by: Rita Williams

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 99. My name is _____Rita Williams_____ and I am a very concerned citizen. The General Assembly states in HB99 “that the purpose of the provisions is to expressly overrule the decision of the Ohio Supreme Court in Gabbard v. Madison Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn. (R.C. 109.78(E).). This is a very troublesome statement and I urge you to give this legislation the priority it deserves. Playing politics with the lives of Ohio’s school children will most definitely lead to tragedy.

Bills calling to arm persons with insufficient training continue to show up in both houses of our legislature, yet the research is clear that the less children are exposed to guns, the safer they are. I hope you would agree we all want to protect children, so rather than listen to the extreme gun lobby, that has a financial motivation to pass this bill, please look at what data tells us: criminal background checks, red flag laws, safe storage laws, additional physical security upgrades, emergency plans among staff and access to school mental health professionals are the ways to increase safety in schools.

<https://everytownresearch.org/reports/keeping-our-schools-safe-a-plan-to-stop-mass-shootings-and-end-all-gun-violence-in-american-schools/>

According to a July 2015 report conducted by Mount St. Mary’s University and the National Gun Victims Action Council, “If you’re going to rely on a gun for self-defense, you should know how to handle and use it.” The report adds that “safe and effective firearms usage requires mental preparation; legal knowledge; judgmental awareness; as well as firearm expertise, skill and familiarity.” We know that hitting a target, (most likely a current or former student, as research shows), and the chaos that transpires with an active shooter in a classroom is something we should never expect a teacher or any other “authorized person” to do. But setting them up with 18 hours of education and two hours of live fire training is completely insufficient. It will never keep students safe but will certainly add to the body count.

Finally, there are no specifications in this legislation regarding safe storage of firearms. Just last week we learned of the death of a videographer by Alec Baldwin who was unintentionally shot on set. When firearms are not properly maintained, cleaned and cared for they can misfire. Unintentional shootings occur. There have also been incidents of guns being stolen from teachers’ desks or even grabbed from armed person’s holsters and winding up in students’ hands.

Student safety is critical. Mass shootings in schools are a terrible reality that parents and children should never have to worry about. The legislation the 134th General Assembly has provided regarding armed personnel in schools falls short yet again of providing adequate training in schools. I ask that you please vote no on this dangerous bill that will result in the shooting deaths of innocent children. Thank you.