

Testimony on House Bill 99
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Submitted by:
Alyssa Louagie

Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this written testimony in opposition to HB 99.

I am very concerned about HB 99 and am in strongly opposed to the bill. I am a parent, a long time school volunteer and PTO/parent group officer of multiple schools, and someone who works in the mental health field. I am involved with Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training in Butler County for law enforcement officers. I have visited and worked with jail staff, law enforcement officers and chiefs, school resource officers (SROs) and other trained correctional and law enforcement individuals in our county.

I am concerned about 3 primary issues relating to this bill:

1. The DRASTIC reduction in training hours that would be required for school personnel to carry weapons in the school. Currently, the law requires that staff who carry weapons at school complete 700+ hours of Ohio Peace Officer Training. This bill reduces the required training to a minimum of 22 hours, and puts the onus on individual school boards to determine what they feel is necessary training for their district. This is unacceptable. It is the responsibility of the STATE to guarantee a safe school environment, not of individual school boards. 2 hours of range time and 18 classroom/online hours is NOT sufficient training to have a gun in a school environment.
2. The lack of requirements in this bill around necessary steps to secure a weapon when it is not in use – either on a staff person's body or in a locked location in a building/classroom. I know for a fact that, for example, armed personnel in the Butler County jail have holsters that require 3 separate steps to remove their gun, to do everything possible to ensure that an inmate does not have access to a gun. (They also do not wear guns within the prison areas that contain inmates.) Our students are not prison inmates, however, the STATE still has an obligation to ensure that students cannot access a staff's firearm when not in use. There is nothing in this bill requiring safe storage of weapons – that they be locked up when not worn or that they be in a holster that prevents others from accessing a gun. THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE. Our students need a guarantee that a staff member's firearm can't be accessed if they are, for example, trying to break up a fight, or playing a game during field day, etc
3. I am also concerned about the liability this bill creates for teachers, staff and districts. This bill does not address potential impacts on the cost of insurance for districts. It does not clarify if a staff member who is armed is acting on their own

behalf or the behalf of the school district, and it does not assign responsibility between the district and a staff member. It does not address the liability of an armed staff member – should they fail to respond with lethal force or should they deem lethal force necessary. It does not recognize the fact that almost 60% of school gun violence as a whole (and 100% of mass shooting incidents in schools) are done by individuals who have a specific connection to the school. This is asking staff to react with lethal force to a current or former student, a parent, a staff or former staff member, etc. Is this a realistic expectation of someone with minimal firearms training?

The National Association of School Resource Officers is against having armed staff members at schools that are not sworn police SROs – see <https://www.nasro.org/faq> - “Should schools arm teachers, or others who are not law enforcement officers?” If individuals who are specifically trained, sworn law enforcement officers don’t recommend arming staff, why does the Ohio Legislature feel they know better than these experts? What specific training and knowledge do members of this committee have that makes them able to counteract a recommendation by law enforcement on this matter?

This is not an issue of whether teachers/school staff should be armed or not – Ohio law already allows armed staff. This is a bill about the amount of TRAINING that should be required of armed staff, and whether a minimum of 22 hours is sufficient. I submit that it is not NEAR enough, and that the entire bill is short-sighted and not adequate to address the complexities of this issue. The law should remain unchanged – armed staff should be required to complete the 700+ hours of Ohio Peace Officer Training or have 20+ years experience as a peace officer.

Respectfully,

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