

Testimony on House Bill 99
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Submitted by:
Aquita Shepherd

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

I am very concerned about HB 99 and am in strong opposition. I understand that the goal of HB99 is to keep Ohio's children safer, but in fact, it will do the opposite. The research is clear that bringing guns into classrooms will make children less safe. Firearms are now the leading cause of death for America's children and teens. Simply having access to a gun increases the risk of suicide by three times and homicide by two times. The less children are exposed to guns, the safer they will be. If we really want to keep students safe, we must listen to the research: pass criminal background checks on all gun sales, pass red flag laws and safe storage laws, add physical security upgrades, develop emergency planning among staff, and provide access to school mental health professionals.¹

Keeping Ohio school children safe most definitely does not include radically reducing the current training requirement for armed teachers. The Ohio Supreme Court ruled that an armed teacher must have at least 20 years experience as an active duty peace officer or have completed Ohio Peace Officer Training. HB 99 would gut that training requirement down to only 22 hours. There is no amount of training that makes it safe for teachers to carry guns in schools. If those highly trained police officers in Uvalde froze up and made mistakes during the mass shooting that claimed so many lives this past week, how many more mistakes would be made (and lives be lost) if you put guns in the hands of teachers?

On a more personal note, I'm a 5th grade teacher and a mother whose 5-year-old daughter will be starting kindergarten this fall. I think it's ridiculous that at this point the only solution to the insanity of sense gun violence is to put a gun in my hand and the hand of my child's kindergarten teacher. I'm all for solutions to this horrible problem. But, they need to be reasonable and not put more teachers and children in danger.

If HB99 passes we can most certainly expect more accidental shootings to occur, more guns winding up in precarious locations, and, should a real school shooter enter the vicinity, this piece of legislation is going to contribute to the loss of life of the children you

¹<https://everytownresearch.org/reports/keeping-our-schools-safe-a-plan-to-stop-mass-shootings-and-end-all-gun-violence-in-american-schools/>

are hoping to protect. For the safety of all of Ohio's school children, please reject HB 99 and focus instead on legislation that would prevent school shootings before they occur.

Respectfully,

Aquita Shepherd