

Testimony on HB 99

House Criminal Justice Committee

Senator Frank Hoagland, Chair

Senator Terry Johnson, Vice Chair

Senator Cecil Thomas, Ranking Minority Member

Submitted by : Cathi Kulik

Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Minority Member Thomas and members of the committee, good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 99. My name is Cathi Kulik, and I am speaking to you today as a concerned private citizen, a mother, a retired public school teacher and the Volunteer Education Lead in Central Ohio for Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. I grew up in Struthers, a suburb of Youngstown, and I attended Bowling Green State University for my undergrad work. My graduate work was done at The Ohio State University and Ashland University. As an adult, I have lived and worked in the Cleveland and Columbus areas. I've spent my entire life, living in Ohio.

This bill would drastically reduce the training requirements under current state law for armed school employees, from 728 hours of OPOTA training to 22 hours, six of which can be completed online. I am opposed to arming teachers, and I am certainly opposed to arming teachers having less training than currently required—let alone over seven hundred hours less. I am also curious about what research supports the number 22, as I have not seen that in any research I have done. In fact, Governor DeWine recommended 152 hours on the advice of OPOTA.

I think about an armed teacher in practical terms. What would this look like in my classroom? Where is the gun stored? In proponent testimony, I heard the gun should be located in another room. So, I would have to leave my room with students alone, in an active shooter situation, to retrieve the gun. That does not sound like a wise decision. I would have to have the gun on me at all times to be an effective protector of my kids. If someone who is armed enters the classroom, it seems likely that I would be the first target, shot first with no opportunity to use

the gun to protect my kids. And if I'm not shot immediately, we have two armed shooters in the classroom. Who gets hurt in the crossfire? Will the police know the difference between the good guy and the bad guy? All recent mass school shootings have involved AR 15's. What kind of weapon are you going to give me to defend myself and my students in a gun fight with an AR 15? 100% of mass school shooters were current or former students IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM that they attacked. You are asking me to shoot one of my kids? I know no teacher who could do that.

As a teacher, I am data based, as you expect me to be. When I am making decisions, I look for scientifically-based research to support the best practices to use with my kids. I consult experts in children's literature as I choose books for my students. I searched for studies and research that would support arming teachers with limited training. The National Association of School Resource Officers states that armed teachers are a risk to law enforcement, students, school community members, and the armed teachers themselves (National Association of School Resource Officers, [nasro.org/faq/](https://nasro.org/faq/)). J. Thomas Manger, then the president of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, said in 2018 that, "The more guns that are coming into the equation, the more volatility and the more risk there is of someone getting hurt" (America's Police call BS on Arming Teachers, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/03/police-chiefs-call-bullshit-on-arming-teachers-sandy-hook-parkland-columbine/>). More guns don't make kids safer.

In a 2018 National Education Survey of 1000 members, 74% of teachers opposed arming teachers ("NEA Survey: Educators Say No To Arming Teachers, Favor Real Solutions to Gun Violence," NEA Today, Tim Walker, March 13, 2018). In a poll of 497 teachers conducted by Gallup in March of 2018, 73% said they are opposed to arming teachers and other staff in school buildings (Megan Brenan, "Most U. S. Teachers Oppose Carrying Guns in Schools" (Gallup, March 16, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2MPTRV5>).

In addition, I learned that schools that arm teachers face liability issues. United Educators specializes in insuring schools, Joe Carter, vice president, stated that he hears concerns from insurance executives that they will be asked to cover schools that arm teachers. "I don't know anyone out there who is ready to offer liability

coverage for schools when they're arming their teachers," Carter said (Washington Post, "One Road Block to Arming Teachers: Insurance Companies," Todd C. Frankel, March, 2018).

But during my research, I noticed the same recurring advice on how to prevent school shootings, and not once did anyone say the solution is more guns. If it were, we'd be the safest country in the world. Rutgers Graduate School of Education Professor Matthew Mayer says that schools need to develop and maintain a positive school climate ("Gun violence: Rutgers expert tells us how to reduce it," Asbury Park Press, March 15, 2018.)

In "Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America" ("Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America," Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence, [education.virginia.edu/prevent-gun-violence](http://education.virginia.edu/prevent-gun-violence), University of Virginia, February 2018) two hundred universities, national mental health groups, school districts and thousands of individual experts agreed with the idea that we need to change our mindset from reaction to prevention. Create a school climate that does not accept bullying and discrimination, provide adequate staffing of counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, and establish and train school and community-based threat assessment teams to provide interventions for those in need. Is this a requirement in Ohio? The Ohio Department of Education has an extensive section on threat assessments, which experts say work. A Secret Service Report found that 100% of school attackers exhibited warning signs before the attack. Attackers make plans and talk about them. ("A Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence," U. S. Department of Homeland Security, United States Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center, Lina Alathari, Ph.D. Chief, 2019). Threat assessments help to identify those students who need our help.

Research from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia also recommends that schools prioritize creating a supportive school environment, decreasing isolation for students, and closing gaps in mental health services ("Gun Violence: Facts and Statistics," Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Center for Violence Prevention, December 2020). In Ohio, there is a significant gap in the level of prevention and intervention services between urban and rural communities, with rural communities receiving a lower level of services.

On the first day of school in 2012 at Perry Hall School in Nottingham, Maryland, a student, armed with a 16-gauge shotgun, pulled the trigger and injured a classmate. Jesse Wasmer, a guidance counselor, tackled the student, stopping the attack. Mr. Wasmer said, "Never have I thought, 'I wish I had a gun.' What we need is more caring adults in these kids' lives, not more guns." ("Gun Violence: Fighting for Our Lives and Our Rights," [books.google.com](https://books.google.com), Matt Doeden, 2019).

I am here today to say let's do the hard work of really solving the problem of gun violence in our schools. The experts tell us the solution is not more guns. Look at the number of guns in the school at Robb Elementary in Texas. There is no amount of training that makes it safe for teachers to carry guns in schools. This bill would worsen an already-dangerous situation by gutting the over 700 hours of training Ohio law currently requires and allowing teachers to carry guns in schools without extensive safety training.

So, I'd like you to think about your vision for Ohio. What do you want for our children? We already have a generation of kids who have grown up hiding under tables and in bathrooms, and climbing out windows. Throughout the lives of these children, the number of guns in the United States has escalated. Guns are now the #1 cause of death for children. Bring teachers, school resource officers and students to the table, the people who are directly impacted by your decision. These are the people who really understand what happens in schools. Let's adopt a proactive approach. Our children. Our teachers. They're not ok.

I'd be happy to answer any questions.