



Testimony on House Bill 99
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Submitted by:
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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.

Born out of the civil rights movement, with more than four decades of advocacy behind us, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness.

As an advocate, as a parent - I am very concerned about HB 99 and am in strong opposition. I understand that the goal of HB 99 is to keep Ohio's children safe, but in fact, it will do the opposite. The research is clear - bringing guns into classrooms will do more harm than good and will make children less safe.

Today, firearms are now the leading cause of death for America's children and teens (ages 1-19). In fact according to an article published in the New England Journal of Medicine, "the increase in the rate of firearm related deaths of all types (suicide, homicide, unintentional and undetermined) among children and adolescents was 29.5% - more than twice as high as the relative increase in the general population."¹

Simply having access to a gun increases the risk of suicide by three times and homicide by two times. In fact, the majority of gun deaths in our country is suicide by firearm, not homicide. In Ohio, the statistics are even worse. A study released in 2021 indicates suicide using a gun spiked 50% among those 15-24 years of age. The less children are exposed to guns, the safer they will be.

Now regarding the presence of guns in a school building to "harden" soft targets - a 2019 study found that there was "no evidence that the presence of resource officers in

¹ Godstick, Jason E. et al. May 19, 2022. Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States. The New England Journal of Medicine. Accessed from: [nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761](https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761)



schools lessened the severity of school shooting incidents.” and there is zero evidence that arming teachers would be any more effective.

Further, national surveys show that arming teachers and allowing other adults to carry firearms on school grounds is not supported by children (70% opposed), teachers (80% opposed), and parents (70% opposed). Not only is this idea unpopular, there is no body of research that shows that this strategy keeps children safe.

What is clear - is that introducing more guns into schools will only increase safety risks for children. In fact, according to a 2021 report from the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, in the past five years, there have been nearly 100 publicly reported incidents of mishandled guns at schools, including accidental discharges, students grabbing a police officers gun during a confrontation, and loaded weapons being left unsecured in spaces where children could access the weapon. In fact, one of these incidents occurred right here in Ohio. In 2019, the District Transportation Director in Sparta Ohio, who had been trained as part of the district's concealed carry program and was authorized to have a firearm on campus. This person left their gun unattended and in an unlocked case and two first graders (six to seven year old children) accessed the gun.

If we really want to keep children safe in their classrooms, we must listen to the research and to our education professionals:

- Pass criminal background checks on all gun sales,
- Pass red flag laws'
- Pass safe storage laws like the Child Access Prevention Law,
- Add physical security upgrades,
- Develop emergency planning among staff, and
- Provide access to school mental health professionals.²

Ohio continuously fails our youth when we as a society refuse to take these actions.

Today, teachers and other school personnel can carry guns in schools as long as they meet certain requirements. Nearly one year ago, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that an

²<https://everytownresearch.org/reports/keeping-our-schools-safe-a-plan-to-stop-mass-shootings-and-end-all-gun-violence-in-american-schools/>



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. However, there is no amount of training that makes it safe for teachers to carry guns in schools or anyone else for that matter. If HB 99 passes we can expect more accidental shootings to occur, more guns accidentally left in bathrooms (which is what typically happens), and, should a real school shooter enter the vicinity, this piece of legislation will do nothing to help the children you are hoping to protect.

Do not put Ohio school children in unnecessary danger and reject HB 99. I urge you as a life long advocate for children and families to please focus instead on legislation that would save lives, protect children from accidental shootings, decrease our rates of suicide amongst young people with a firearm, and prevent firearms from being easily accessible to children.

Respectfully,

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