

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson and Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing my written testimony in opposition to House Bill 99. My name is Chris Wolf, and I am a resident of the state of Ohio.

For the past several decades, the Republican Party has used the same trite and untrue arguments in response to those who desire to reduce gun violence in our state and country through the enactment of responsible laws that would support gun safety while upholding the Second Amendment to our Constitution. Those arguments include:

- “Guns don’t kill, people do. Well, at least only mentally ill people use guns to kill others. OK, maybe we can’t prove they have mental health issues, but anyone who kills someone with a gun is mentally ill, right?”
- Guns aren’t the problem. Mental illness is the problem. We just need more mental health support. But we can’t focus on a mental health agenda because we are spending so much time and money on other problems caused by the socialist liberals.
- And, let’s be honest, what we really need is more religion. No truly religious person would have mental health issues or misuse a gun.
- Besides, the second amendment provides us with our God-given right to own guns.”

Relying on these arguments and under the direction of the National Rifle Association, the Buckeye Firearms Association, and other similar groups, the Republican Party in Ohio has passed a series of laws which result in more people carrying more guns more often in more places. On June 13, the most recent of these laws goes into effect – permitless concealed carry.

These laws were passed with the promise that they would make Ohio and our nation safer. Instead, the opposite has occurred. Gun crimes, gun deaths, and gun injuries continue to rise each year. Mass casualty events occur with greater frequency. Firearms have become the leading cause of injury and death for our children.

Despite all the evidence you refuse to admit your past policies and laws are misguided and wrong. Instead, you are now laying the groundwork to “harden” our schools. This effort begins with HB 99 which will allow school staff other than school resource officers to carry guns onto the grounds of Ohio’s primary, elementary and secondary schools with virtually no training or qualifications to do so.

This is only the first step toward “hardening” our schools. Per recent comments from our Governor and other prominent Republicans across the country, steps that are likely to soon follow would include state-of-the-art security in our schools; enhanced training of school personnel in areas such as behavioral threat assessment and first-aid; and walls and fences around our schools with a single point of entry to be manned by armed guards. Once implemented, these measures would essentially turn our schools into prisons with teachers replaced by SWAT Team members and EMTs responsible for the education of our children. In addition, these steps are expensive and ineffective in the face of the general public’s ability to arm itself with body armor and military grade weapons and ammunition.

HB 99 is misguided and will not improve the safety of our schools. Do not advance this bill out of committee.

Lastly, I just have to say that gun ownership is NOT a God-given right. God did not say on the eighth day, "Let there be Guns. Guns of all types and all calibers. And let every man, woman, and child have a gun to carry with them wherever they go. For it is with Guns that we can adhere to my greatest commandment, 'To love thy neighbor as I have loved you'". To claim gun ownership is "God given" is to disrespect God.

Cut the crap and do your job. Stop the denial (Guns don't kill, people do). Stop the deflection (Mental illness is the real problem). Stop the redirection (Let's harden our schools). Otherwise, you will continue to diminish the impact of "thoughts and prayers" and we will continue to fly our flags – the most recognizable symbols of our state and country – at half-staff more often than we fly them at full staff.

Sincerely,

Chris Wolf