

Testimony on Sub. 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 written testimony in opposition to HB 99.

A longtime Ohio resident and regular voter, I am also a former teacher who has taught at all levels from kindergarten through 12th grade, as both a full-time and a substitute teacher, in private as well as public schools. Two of my grandchildren are in Ohio public schools, and my son is an Ohio elementary public school teacher. In the best of circumstances, teaching is an extremely stressful job – by far the hardest job I’ve ever had (and I’ve had several others). I was fortunate enough to have left the profession before gun proliferation and resulting violence had become an everyday worry. I didn’t have to conduct shooter drills, nor did I have to deal with students’ very reasonable fears about falling victim to gun violence.

It is completely shocking to me that Ohio legislators would entertain the notion that arming school staff, particularly with minimal training, is a good idea. Given that ALL mass shooters since 2013 have been students or former students of the schools targeted, what teacher would not hesitate to shoot a current or former student? In a Dec. 8, 2020 letter to legislative leaders, police chiefs in Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown attested that significantly reducing firearm training for school personnel increases the likelihood that a student will be unintentionally harmed or killed by a firearm in a school. Do Ohio legislators know something teachers and police chiefs don’t know?

For a variety of reasons (low pay, few resources, ever-increasing responsibility and expectation, pandemic fallout, etc.), teachers are leaving the profession in droves. And now we want to put yet another burden on them while offering only 22 hours of training (including only a couple of hours of actual practice on a firing range) to tackle a duty they have never been professionally trained to handle? How many hats can any teacher be expected to wear without being crushed under the weight?

Here are some questions I hope you will discuss with actual classroom teachers before voting “yes” on HB 99:

- 1) Qualifications - What sort of school staff member would be willing to be armed? Would this person have the sort of temperament to be able to handle a mass-shooting situation? What qualifications would be required? Would this person receive additional compensation/life insurance, etc.?
- 2) Expectations - Is it reasonable to expect a teacher – who generally operates in a chaotic environment on a good day – to view a shooter situation objectively? What teacher would be willing to shoot one of his/her own students? Is it reasonable to think that a vastly undertrained teacher could do a better job than the 19 officers in Texas, some of whom were apparently too scared of an AR-15 to enter the school building?
- 3) Consultation - When considering this bill, how many actual teachers have been consulted?
- 4) Safe Storage - Why is there no provision for safe storage of a weapon when it is not in use? Is it, perhaps, because there’s no good answer? After all, in a building crowded with curious students, there’s a decent chance that a student will access a teacher’s weapon. Assuming a

provision might be added regarding effective safe storage, how would a teacher access a weapon in an emergency situation without endangering innocent students?

5) Notification – What provision would be made to notify parents that members of the school staff are armed?

6) Performance – What guidance is offered on the use of lethal force by armed school staff?

7) Substitutes – What happens if armed school staff members are not available during an emergency (e.g., home sick, at a conference, etc.)? Would a completely untrained substitute teacher have to assume responsibility for a weapon?

8) Number of armed staff members – If there are, say, two armed staff members in a school, how would those members know where to go to intervene in a shooting situation any more than local police officers would? Is it reasonable to expect that, just because some school staff members carry weapons, they would be at the right place at the right time?

9) Protection – What would be done to protect an armed teacher? Law enforcement officers called to the scene are armed with weapons, many more hours of training, and bullet-proof vests, but we have seen that many highly trained officers STILL have been reluctant to engage mass shooters. Would an armed teacher have to wear a bullet-proof vest at all times? If the teacher does wear such gear every day, all day, wouldn't students notice? Should teachers be expected to sacrifice themselves in an emergency while fulfilling demanding teaching duties and keeping an eye on every student in a classroom? If a student manages to gain access to a teacher's firearm, will that teacher be held liable for any injuries or deaths that might result?

Bills calling to arm persons with insufficient training continue to show up in both houses of our legislature, despite research which makes clear that the less children are exposed to guns, the safer they are. I hope you would agree we all want to protect children, so rather than listen to the extreme gun lobby, which is financially motivated to urge passage of this bill, please look at what data tells us: criminal background checks, red flag laws, safe storage laws, additional physical security upgrades, emergency plans among staff and access to school mental health professionals are the ways to increase safety in schools.

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

According to a July 2015 report conducted by Mount St. Mary's University and the National Gun Victims Action Council, "If you're going to rely on a gun for self-defense, you should know how to handle and use it." The report adds that "safe and effective firearms usage requires mental preparation; legal knowledge; judgmental awareness; as well as firearm expertise, skill and familiarity." We know that hitting a target, (most likely a current or former student, as research shows), and the chaos that transpires with an active shooter in a classroom is something we should never expect a teacher or any other "authorized person" to do. But setting them up with only 22 hours of education and two hours of live fire training is completely insufficient. It will never keep students safe, but it will certainly add to the body count.

Young people depend on adults to exercise restraint and wisdom. When adults fail to consider the ramifications of the decisions they make, children suffer. We are currently traumatizing children with "shooter drills" while ignoring the elephant in the room – the greater likelihood that the shooter will *not* be an outsider, but rather a student, or even a teacher, who reacts impulsively out of fear or simply fires a weapon by accident. To ignore such real possibilities is irresponsible, and playing politics with the lives of Ohio's school children will lead to tragedy.

For the sake of Ohio students and teachers, I urge you to vote no on Sub. HB 99.

