

Opponent testimony for HB 99
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To Chair Hoagland, Vice Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 99.

My name is Derek Burtch and I am here in my capacity as a teacher, a parent, and co-creator of the educational nonprofit Erase the Space. Of these three identities, I have held the title of teacher the longest. I have just finished my 14th year teaching in the state of Ohio having spent six years at North Union High School in Richwood, seven years at Olentangy Liberty High School in Powell, and am currently teaching at Olentangy High School in Lewis Center. My son just turned two and a half, so I am still very much learning what it means to be a parent.

As a teacher, 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. In my role as teacher, my first priority is safety. If students don't feel safe, learning is unlikely to take place. 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. And I am thinking of not just my students, but my son and my nieces as they go through school. 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 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. Besides this reduction of time for training, there is no amount of training that makes it safe for teachers to carry guns in schools. 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 are hoping to protect. The scenario in which arming teachers could possibly work is if the shooter were to target the room with the armed teacher, and the teacher would be able to get their gun, switch from teacher to marksman, and accurately neutralize the threat within 10 seconds, because by then people would be dead or injured. This was the case in Benton,

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

Kentucky when a 15-year-old shooter killed two and wounded 14 within 10 seconds.² There wasn't enough time.

Aside from the slim scenario where this solution would work for student safety, there is plenty of evidence that makes the argument that this would not improve safety and, indeed, cause more harm, like the accuracy statistics of law enforcement officers who receive hundreds of hours of training, much more than the 22 mandatory hours proposed in this bill. A study out of the University of Texas states, "Relatively little attention has been paid to the fact that these policies come with the expectation that teachers are able to instantaneously switch from classroom teacher to expert marksman in the chaos of an active shooter situation with panicked students in their presence. Research shows that regularly trained law enforcement officers' accuracy rate in active shooter situations ranges from 18% to 43% (Rostker, et al., 2008). The low accuracy rates are most often attributed to the high stress elements of these encounters (Lewinski, et al., 2013; Vickers & Lewinski, 2012) and are not a regular focal point of legislative hearings."³ Please, let this fact be a focus of this legislative hearing. If law enforcement's accuracy tops out at 43% in high stress situations, and they are trained for hundreds of hours on firearm use, how do we imagine a teacher with 22 hours of training would fare? What does this likely inaccuracy add up to in a classroom setting?

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. We can focus on funding mental health programs for students, community health programs for families, and focus on preventative care to meet the needs of people. Violence is a tragic expression of unmet needs, and right now, our governing body is not meeting the needs of its people. Focus on how we can meet the needs of all people instead of proposing solutions that are likely to contribute to the violence rather than prevent it.

Respectfully,

Derek Burtch

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<https://www.bsu.edu/news/press-center/archives/2019/4/study-finds-no-evidence-hardened-schools-are-safer>

³ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1267255.pdf>