

Testimony on House Bill 99
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Submitted by:
Molly Farrell

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.

I am writing to you as a mother of two children, one in preschool and one in kindergarten at an Ohio public school. I am extremely concerned about this bill, HB 99, and I urge you to make sure this does not go forward. I know that especially after last week's massacre in Uvalde, Texas, we all want to do everything we can to make sure that our schools are safer than they are today. However, this bill makes me as a mother even more terrified for my children's safety.

Let me tell you a story. The day I brought my daughter's teacher flowers for Teacher Appreciation Day, I arrived to the classroom during a tense moment, with a traumatized child in tears and heading to a room for calming down, while the expert teacher reassured the children that they were safe, and having "a serious meeting" with the children to talk about how big feelings expressed in the classroom appear in their bodies. They talked about hearts racing and what that feels like, and how to find their "anchor" by putting their hands on their bellies to feel their breath. This year, after COVID, has been one of the hardest ever for teachers. Children have lost caregivers to COVID, they've had caregivers lose jobs, become disabled, and they are recovering from over a year of losing the consistency of their number one most reliable source of safety and food outside their home-school. Teachers are still working on establishing that sense of safety for all students, for teaching them how to be in a classroom with their tense bodies and big feelings. The absolute last things these classrooms and school buildings need is the potential for a gun to fall out of a teacher's pocket or bag; or for a curious five-year-old looking for scotch tape in a classroom of 27 children to find it;¹ or for a teacher with nowhere near the amount of training of a school resource officer or a law enforcement officer to mistake an opportunity for learning about how to cope with trauma with a life-threatening situation.

I ask every parent before a potential playdate with my child whether or not they have a gun and, if they do, how safely it is stored. We know that having a gun in the home makes accidents, homicides, and suicides more likely in that home. How can we expect this to be any different in schools, especially if we reduce the current requirement that an armed teacher have at least 20 years experience as an active duty peace officer or have completed Ohio Peace Officer Training,² and gut that training requirement down to only 22 hours? No amount of training that makes it safe for teachers to carry guns in schools.

On a practical level, my child's school had to close because there were not enough qualified substitute teachers this winter. The last time her teacher was absent, the children had to be split

among different classrooms because no substitute was available. Teachers become teachers because they want to wield calculators, pens, and pencils, not because they want to work in a war zone. Increasing the amount of guns among their colleagues makes their jobs less safe, and can make them more likely to retire or leave the profession during a massive teacher shortage. How will we find more teachers when we increase the likelihood of incidents we have already seen, where their fellow staff discharge a gun on school grounds and risk their safety?³

If you want to do something to make me as an Ohio voter feel safer sending my kids to school, do something that school resource officers and teachers actually support—they are in strong opposition to this bill⁴—considering they are the ones who know school safety best. Even considering this bill the week when we are all still grieving and terrified is an affront to parents like me who actually want to make a world where children come home in buses, not hearses.

Respectfully,

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¹ There have been incidents where guns carried into schools were misplaced or stolen and later found in the hands of students. David Harten, “Police: Jacksonville High Student Steals Gun from Teacher,” Arkansas Democrat Gazette, January 17, 2012, <https://bit.ly/2V3psWX> ; Roche Madden, “Police Find Teacher’s Stolen Gun with Student,” Fox 2 Now, October 25, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2S9hqy7>.

² See ORC Ann. 109.78(D).

³ Alexandra Seltzer, Hannah Winston, and Olivia Hitchcock, “BREAKING: Man Arrested in 2013 Murder of Dreyfoos School Janitors,” The Palm Beach Post, May 25, 2017, <https://pbpo.st/2RE4R8V>; Vanessa McCray, “Lithia Springs Teacher Who Shot Himself Identified,” Atlanta Journal Constitution, August 21, 2017, <https://on-ajc.com/2M6D42h> ; Missy Schrott, “Officer Accidentally Discharges Weapon at George Washington Middle School,” Alexandria Times, March 2018, <https://bit.ly/2BnC8zT>; Amy Larson, “Seaside High Teacher Accidentally Fires Gun in Class, Students Injured,” KSBW, March 14, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2Be9cub>.

⁴ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, American Federation of Teachers, and National Education Association, “Keeping Our Schools Safe: A Plan for Preventing Mass Shootings and Ending All Gun Violence in American Schools,” February 2020, <https://www.everytownresearch.org/school-safety-plan> . NASRO, “NASRO Opposes Arming Teachers,” February 22, 2018. Available here: <https://bit.ly/3cVbBxE> .