

Testimony on House Bill 99
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Submitted by:
Kim Leddy

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 in strong opposition of HB99. I understand that the goal of HB99 is to keep Ohio's children safer, but in fact, it will do the opposite. The research is clear that bringing guns into classrooms will make children less safe. Our schools should be oases of learning, support, inspiration, and community — not armed strongholds that foster fear and suspicion. Public education is a hallmark of American democracy and to filter it through the lens of fear instead of joy will damage generations of young psyches.

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. 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.

Keeping Ohio school children safe most definitely does not include radically reducing the current training requirement for armed teachers. In *Gabbard et al. v. Madison Local School District Board of Education, et al.*, 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. 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. 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.

As a public school teacher for over 20 years, I have not just been responsible for teaching and curriculum, I have been expected to act as a school nurse, therapist, mandatory reporter, and now, a safety expert. Beyond my job as a teacher, the rest of these roles have been thrust upon me with no supplementary training. All the teaching professionals I have worked with throughout my career — in direct contrast to how we are portrayed in the media, often encouraged by political posturing — are dedicated to doing everything possible to ensure both student and community success; however, we can't shoulder *everything*. Wouldn't it be

more fruitful and beneficial for school safety for teachers to be trained on how to identify and report “red flag” behavior in a manner that would be taken seriously by administration and families?

Respectfully,

Kim Leddy
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