

May 31st, 2022

Re: Opposition to HB 99

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the committee,

My name is Lara Kowalcyk. I am 19-years-old and going into my junior year at Wellesley College. I have been involved in gun safety advocacy since my sophomore year of high school. Thank you for giving me the time to hear my testimony. I am here today to share with you why, as an Ohioan, student, and American, I am opposed to HB 99.

As any American student in my generation, I have grown up surrounded by gun violence. Not only have I grown up hearing about local shootings, I have been surrounded by mass shootings. Every American deserves to live without the fear of being shot in their home, house of worship, the movie theater, or school. Today, we are here to discuss the place of firearms in schools - a place, as a current college student, I have spent a lot of time in.

I believe that firearms have no place on school grounds. I know, for me, I would become increasingly aware of the threat of firearms if they have a place in the classroom. This distraction would be reflected in my grades and retention. Right now, according to Everytown data, American schools are where 12 students are killed and another 17 students are wounded annually, by firearms. The number should be zero. Will HB 99 help Ohio work towards the end of death on K-12 school grounds? The answer, at the end of the day, is no.

HB 99 will place guns in school while those responsible for the guns will only be required to complete 22 hours of training, 818 hours less than law enforcement officers receive. As Americans, we are guaranteed the right to responsible gun ownership. Placing a gun in places where six-year-olds frequent with only one adult with substantially less training than a law enforcement officer is not responsible gun ownership. This will only lead to increasing concerns of another child being added to the list of fatalities that have occurred in American schools.

Not only will this increase safety concerns among communities, teachers and school resource officers don't support this legislation. The American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the National Association of School Resource Officers oppose arming

teachers. Teachers and resource officers are aware of the substantial threat introduced when firearms are permitted in the classroom.

Finally, some may argue that firearms in classrooms may help in the situation of an active shooter. Just last week, that argument that the gun lobby has been pushing was gutted entirely. According to the Texas Tribune, at 11:33 am, the shooter entered Robb Elementary School and began shooting. At 11:35 am, the Uvalde Police entered the school. In less than 20 minutes, police reinforcement arrived at Robb Elementary School. The shooter was not shot and taken into custody until 12:50 pm. Each and every one of those officers on the scene received at least 18 weeks of training. Yet, it took those same armed police officers over one hour to take the shooter into custody while that shooter was in a classroom full of children. Only school supplies were between the officers and the shooter. The guns were added to the scene, yet, it is clear that the gun lobby is pushing forth a dangerous and disproved rationale to legislation such as HB 99.

Looking back, after the Sandy Hook shooting, we were at a crossroads: to enact legislation to prevent these tragedies from occurring or do nothing. We chose to do nothing. We again chose to do nothing after the Parkland shooting. After the Santa Fe shooting. And now, just one week after the Robb Elementary School shooting, we are discussing a piece of legislation that will do nothing. For proponents of HB 99, this will be your legacy. The legacy of condolences while doing nothing to prevent these preventable tragedies.

Each and every one of you have the power to do Ohio's part in preventing this truly American problem. Doing something is enacting "Red Flag" laws, secure gun storage laws, and strengthening background check laws. Doing something is not enacting HB 99.

We are at a crossroads today. Do the right thing, do something. I am asking that Ohio lawmakers vote no on HB 99. I hope I can count on you to do so.

Thank you,

Lara Kowalcyk

Columbus, Ohio