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Opponent Testimony on House Bill 99 –
ELIMINATE RETENTION UNDER THE THIRD GRADE READING GUARANTEE
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Tracey Mackay - League of Women Voters of Ohio
May 31, 2022

Chairman Hoagland, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas and Members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee:

Thank you for letting me speak on SUB HB 99 and the League of Women Voters' strong opposition to the bill.

My name is Tracey Mackay. I am a member of the League and the committee chair for the LWV Ohio Arming School Personnel Study. The Arming School Personnel Study assesses the impact on the health and safety of students, school personnel, and communities when school personnel are armed while on school grounds.

Our twelve-person committee of League members from around the state researched and discussed the effects of guns in schools for over a year. The committee members are educators who have spent their careers creating safe learning environments for students, a psychologist dedicated to children's mental health, high school and college students who shared their first-hand experiences with lockdown drills, members of Moms Demand Action, and a member who subscribes to the Buckeye Firearm Association Newsletter. **When the study was sent to local Leagues to discuss and weigh in, League members overwhelmingly supported no guns in schools.** Again, recognizing the current status of rural districts and the need for quick response, decisions were made to support more training rather than less.

The League of Women Voters of the US has taken a strong position on protection of the "Consumer" - in this case both the students in these schools and the persons pledging their lives in protection of them. In that regard, **we oppose sub. HB 99's overriding of the Ohio Supreme Court's decision in Gabbard v. Madison Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.** We support regulating firearms for Consumer safety and the training necessary for high stress situations that might involve implicit bias. Twenty hours in no way constitutes proper training for such situations. It is also inconceivable that a bill directly overrules an Ohio Supreme Court decision by name.

Additionally, since the introduction of this bill, the Arming School Personnel study has completed the consensus process among Ohio League chapters resulting in our strong current position. While the consensus is that under no circumstances should school personnel be armed, Leagues did weigh in on what requirements need to be there given Ohio's current practice. Again, underscoring that they opposed the arming of school personnel, Leagues called for **extensive** training beyond the concealed carry permit. A combination of state and local law enforcement should determine the firearm training requirements such as frequency, length, content, certification, trainer qualifications, continuing education etc. for the training of armed school personnel. **Included in that training, implicit bias needs to be considered as well as the trauma of all involved.**

The very action of having to decide to arm school personnel has already come under tremendous criticism: The American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, National PTA, the National Association of School Psychologists and the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio reject the idea of arming school personnel. The National Association of School Resource Officers recommends that if school personnel are to be armed their training should be on par with law enforcement positions. Additionally, there is concern among law enforcement officials that school personnel would not have the ability to effectively make split second, life-or-death decisions.

Already under stress from active shooter drills, studies also show that students, particularly in middle and high schools, feel less safe and have more anxiety when school personnel are armed. Notwithstanding, there are districts, some as far as 40 minutes away from professional emergency assistance, who have made the tough decision to utilize current Ohio law, passed in 2016, to arm their personnel as part of the districts' safety programs. If HB99 removes all training, allowing school personnel to be armed with the most minimal safety training, the situation would be more complicated and worsen the circumstances for all concerned. The National Association of School resource Officers notes that without proper training and regular shooting practice under high-stress simulations, tragedy could result. (<https://www.nasro.org/news/2018/02/22/news-releases/nasro-opposes-arming-teachers/>)

HB99 is endangering our students, teachers, school administrators, law enforcement and all other personnel. Without reasonable safeguards no one is protected. Having listened to so much of the testimony that was presented in the House, even police and safety officers have brought up the need for implicit bias training, supervision, teamwork and safety officer training at the very least.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio categorically opposes HB99. Thank you for your consideration.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio was formed in May 1920 out of Ohio's woman suffrage movement. The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has almost 4000 members and 32 local Leagues and At-Large Units across the Buckeye State.