



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



AS THE VOICE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

Scott W. DiMauro
President

Jeffrey Wensing
Vice President

Mark A. Hill
Secretary-Treasurer

Patricia Collins Murdock
Executive Director

OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Substitute House Bill 99 Opponent Testimony
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The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

Good afternoon, Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee. My name is Scott DiMauro. I am a high school social studies teacher from Worthington with 16 years of classroom experience, and I currently serve as President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of the approximately 120,000 members of the OEA, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Substitute House Bill 99. The bill would exempt a “person authorized to go armed within a school safety zone” from satisfactorily completing an approved basic peace officer training program and instead creates a new set of requirements.

The safety of Ohio’s students and educators is our utmost priority. Just like every previous school shooting in our nation, last week’s school shooting in Texas has left us all in shock and grief. Another school turned from a center of learning into a place of violence. Another community was forced to accept the loss of their children, siblings, and friends. Our children deserve a broader conversation about how to prevent this type of tragedy from happening yet again.

OEA members have already grappled with this issue. Our legislative policy adopted by OEA members states that teachers and other school employees should not be asked to serve dual roles as educators and school safety personnel armed with weapons. However, where local policies call for the arming of school personnel, we believe that the training requirements must be robust and that parents and the broader community must be adequately informed. By these measures the current version of Substitute House Bill 99 falls short.

Training Requirements

Substitute House Bill 99 represents marginal improvement to the as-introduced version of the bill. We are pleased that the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission (OPOTC) is required to create the training enumerated under the bill. However, OEA remains concerned and

225 E. Broad St., Box 2550,
Columbus, OH 43216
PHONE: (614) 228-4526
or 1-800-282-1500
FAX: (614) 228-8771



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opposed to the training hour requirements in the legislation. Substitute House Bill 99 would prescribe state training requirements at a maximum of 20 hours of initial training and 4 additional hours to be completed annually. For comparison, in the state of Ohio you need 200 hours to be a licensed nail technician. OEA believes the level of firearms training under the current version of the bill remains woefully inadequate and will ultimately jeopardize the safety of students and staff.

Of the states that explicitly allow school personnel to be armed, most require staff to complete a curriculum established by the state's police officer standards and training commission, and many of these training requirements are substantial. For example, Florida requires 132 total hours of comprehensive firearm safety and proficiency training conducted by instructors certified by the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission.

In 2014, Attorney General DeWine stated that "It's not just about can I [armed school staff] shoot a gun. That's just a small part of it. It's: Do I have enough training to be able to react so that my training goes into effect, and I don't end up shooting someone who's innocent." (Dayton Daily News, Jan. 28, 2014). AG DeWine asked the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission to develop recommendations for what training would be appropriate for school personnel. The model curriculum recommended approximately 150 hours of training, including subjects such as school shooting, subject control, use of force, building searches, crisis intervention, as well as certification in first aid and CPR.

While we may disagree on whether arming staff is a suitable solution for responding to violence in a school, OEA strongly believes an appropriate course of action for the legislature is to prescribe clear, robust state minimum training requirements for "other personnel" authorized to carry weapons on school grounds. Therefore, OEA recommends that the bill further be amended to remove references that the training created by the OPOTC should not exceed 20 hours of initial training and 4 hours of annual training. The OPOTC should not be boxed in by the legislature on hour requirements that they may not see as sufficient for adequate training.

Transparency

Substitute House Bill 99 also requires a board of education or governing body of a school to notify the public that they have authorized one or more persons to go armed within a school. However, the bill does not expressly state how often the governing body should notify the public and if school districts who have already authorized this policy are required to notify the public. Because residents and students change within a district, OEA requests this provision be amended to require annual notification to the public, including notification from school districts who have already made this authorization, and be posted on the district's website.

In conclusion, OEA remains opposed to Substitute House Bill 99 as currently written. We urge the Ohio Senate to require rigorous training standards, created by safety experts, for school employees authorized to be armed within a school safety zone.