

**Testimony on House Bill 99**  
**Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee**  
**Senator Frank Hoagland, Chair**  
**Senator Terry Johnson, Vice Chair**  
**Senator Cecil Thomas, Ranking Member**  
**Submitted by: Patty Benninger**

Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB 99. My name is Patty Benninger. I am a retired teacher, who has taught for over 40 years. I am married to a psychologist who sees many unstable teenagers and would hope that Ohio could take necessary steps to keep young people safe in their schools. Because of the focus of our professions, and because we have two adult daughters and one grandson, we are particularly interested in limiting access to guns by opposing House Bill 99.

It is alarming that gun deaths in Ohio increased 62% from 2007-2020. In comparison, gun deaths rose nationally by about 27% in that same time period.<sup>1</sup> If HB 99 is passed, a school employee who is authorized to go armed will only be required to complete 22 hours of training, which is a drastic reduction in the present number of hours of training required- 728 hours. An armed teacher cannot be transformed into a specially trained law enforcement officer in an episode of extreme duress who only completed 22 hours of training. Even trained police officers have been found to successfully hit their intended targets in just 18% of incidents involving an exchange of gunfire<sup>2</sup>, so it is unreasonable to believe that teachers with just 22 hours of training can even be that accurate. Arming teachers elevates the risk of accidents and negligent use of firearms. There are at least 100 reported incidents of mishandled guns at schools in the last five years, including a Whitney Middle School teacher (Whitney, Texas) who left her gun unattended in a teacher's workroom. The teacher served as a school guardian and was authorized to have a gun on campus. A few other examples of guns left accessible: A Central Middle School teacher (Saint Louis, Missouri) brought a gun to her school and it was stolen by two students; A Sacred Heart K-8 School staff member (Glyndon, Maryland) left a gun in the restroom; and A Seaside High School teacher (Seaside, California) unintentionally fired a gun in class. One 17-year-old boy suffered moderate injuries when fragments from the bullet ricocheted off the ceiling and lodged in his neck.<sup>3</sup>

The chiefs of police of Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown oppose reducing firearm training. In a December 8, 2020, letter to Legislative Leaders and Committee Chairs, they stated "Significantly reducing firearm training for school personnel will make our schools less safe and increase the likelihood that a student will be unintentionally

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2022/02/18/ohio-gun-deaths-in-2021-near-an-all-time-high/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ajc.com/blog/get-schooled/gunfights-trained-officers-have-percent-hit-rate-yet-want-arm-teachers/mDBlhDtV6Na4wJVpeu58cM/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/every-incident-of-mishandled-guns-in-schools/>

harmed or killed by a firearm in a school.” Several teachers’ unions, including Ohio Education Association and the Ohio Federation of Teachers also oppose this bill.<sup>4</sup> A survey found that 63 percent of parents of elementary, middle, and high school students oppose arming teachers.<sup>5</sup> One notable parent who testified last year, Ben Adams, was part of a lawsuit filed by parents in the Madison Local Schools district to argue that the 24 hours training for armed teachers fell far short of the training that should be required and the Ohio Supreme Court determined that the Peace Officer training of 728 hours is required of these teachers.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Adams argued that the training reduction is not enough and said “It is less training than you would need to become a manicurist in Ohio. It is less than the bus driver needs. This is deeply irresponsible to me, and it's wrong, someone with so little training should not be trusted to carry firearms in the school with my children.”<sup>7</sup> More than a hundred people testified against HB 99 in April, 2021, and more than 80 people testified against the bill in November, 2021, compared to a handful of those who testified in favor of the bill. Taking into consideration all those who oppose this bill, it would be surprising that lawmakers could still be representing their constituents if they are in favor of HB 99.

Instead of proposing the reduction of training hours of teachers or school personnel, schools should instead pursue evidence-based interventions, which include extreme risk laws, secure storage awareness, threat assessment programs and a national ban on assault rifles.<sup>8</sup> If any of these measures are enacted, our schools would be safer for our children. I taught young children for over 40 years, and took a school shooter training from our local police department. This training was 3 hours, and did not include any training for arming teachers. There was a simulation exercise which involved a police officer going through our school hallways shooting off blanks, and we were to follow the steps learned in the training, including locking our door, turning off lights and barricading the door with heavy items. It usually takes a teacher of small children about 5 minutes just to line up to leave the classroom for activities, so I can imagine it would take much more time to follow the school shooter steps, while the teacher is trying to keep the children calm. Asking a teacher to also retrieve a weapon in this scenario is totally not feasible, and jeopardizes children’s safety.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2021/11/18/armed-teachers-bill-passes-ohio-house/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://bit.ly/2FHliOu>

<sup>6</sup> <https://legallyspeakingohio.com/2021/07/merit-decision-armed-teachers-must-meet-statutory-training-or-experience-requirements-erin-g-gabbard-et-al-v-madison-local-school-district-board-of-education-et-al/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.statenews.org/government-politics/2021-04-15/house-bill-sets-minimum-required-training-for-teachers-to-carry-guns-in-schools>

<sup>8</sup> <https://everytownresearch.org/report/preventing-gun-violence-in-american-schools/>

I urge lawmakers to defeat HB 99 and enact other legislation which would keep our schools safe.

Respectfully submitted,

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