

Testimony on House Bill 99
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Submitted by:
Sara Salsbury

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 an Ohio public school teacher and mother of two public high school students.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, May 24th, I was in the middle of helping my high school students with Autism through our third active shooter drill of the school year as the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas was taking place. In the course of my 20 year teaching career, so much has changed. I know how to barricade a door and watch for intruders. I keep my door locked and closed regularly. I lose sleep wondering if I will ever have to choose if my class will remain in place and lockdown or decide if we have enough time to run and evacuate the building. Will my students with autism be able to remain quiet if we lockdown? Will they listen and not melt down and follow me out of the building? I have provided so much extra support to my students in the form of hiding fidgets around my classroom (because you never know where they'll have to hide in the event of an active shooter), creating visual social stories of active shooter drills and what is expected of my students in so many different situations so they aren't afraid, having conversations about guns, and hiding my fears behind smiles to make sure they aren't scared. I have changed how I teach, even though I know it is not in the best interest of my students, because my lawmakers are not protecting us. And now you want to bring guns into our places of learning? The message here is that you have failed. On a regular basis our lawmakers are letting access to guns and loose gun laws win over the lives of our children and teachers. I will not accept that type of failure and I will not tell my students that you are unable to protect them so I need a gun in my classroom to do so.

As a teacher, I am required to make decisions in my classroom that are research based. I am asking that this committee do the same when making decisions that impact my job and the safety of our students and teachers. Everytown for Gun Safety compiled the data from gunfire on school grounds between 2013 and 2019. According to this research, 58% of shooters were associated with the school - either as current or former students, staff, faculty, or school resource officers. When looking at the four mass shooting incidents since 2013 (where four or more people were shot and killed),

including the most recent tragedy in Uvalde, Texas, 100% of shooters were current or former students. These mass school shooters are or were students of the school and we are going to ask teachers to shoot them. And when is anyone going to connect the dots that we are training these killers with our own active shooter drills, as demonstrated through the Uvalde's shooter's barricading of the classroom door? The U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence (2019), found that 100% of school attackers exhibited warning signs ahead of time. Can we all agree that we do not want students who are struggling behaviorally and showing signs of aggression to have access to guns and weapons of war? This research also shows that 73% to 80% of school shooters used guns from their home or the home of a family member or friend. We know that safe storage laws save lives. There is no data or research that demonstrates a reduction in gun violence due to armed school staff. Not a single example. When making data driven decisions, it is clear that to reduce gun violence on school grounds, we need threat assessment programs, red flag laws, and safe storage laws to prevent these shooters from getting their hands on firearms in the first place. This will reduce gun violence, allow schools to intervene early, and provide students the support they need in a time of crisis.

[\(https://everytownresearch.org/report/preventing-gun-violence-in-american-schools/\)](https://everytownresearch.org/report/preventing-gun-violence-in-american-schools/)

When this bill (in the form of SB 317) was heard last legislative session there was overwhelming opposition by Ohio residents, as demonstrated through almost 300 testimonies against passage. In contrast, there were only two proponent testimonies and those were given by lobbyists of the NRA and Buckeye Firearms Association. No evidence or research was presented that supports the connection between arming school staff and a reduction in school gun violence. In fact, research shows that firearms are now the leading cause of death for children and teens. Simply having access to a gun increases the risk of suicide by three times and homicide by two times. If teachers have firearms in a classroom, it increases the likelihood that they will be accessed by students. There is simply not enough information to support implementing such a dangerous strategy.

[\(https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-teens/](https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-teens/)
[https://everytownresearch.org/solution/arming-teachers/\)](https://everytownresearch.org/solution/arming-teachers/)

Schools are a place of learning where students need to feel safe and respected. At this critical time when firearms are the leading cause of death for American children and teens, when we are a few years into a pandemic, when students' mental health is vulnerable, and when firearm suicide rates have increased among our youth in recent years, we need our legislators to provide much needed assistance. HB 99 does the opposite and will only make our students and teachers less safe. I want to conclude by

making the point very clear that it is past time to listen to those of us inside school buildings. We are used to making decisions based on data because that is what we have been required to do for years and we know that these shooters have been sitting through our active shooter drills and they know our plans. They know how our school buildings work, which doors are open, and at what time of the day. We also know that 100% of them had behavioral warning signs ahead of time and should never have been able to get their hands on a gun if our legislators were brave enough to put laws in place to stop them. Just like the law prohibiting children under 18 from purchasing a firearm kept the Uvalde shooter from getting a gun until the day he turned 18. If only the minimum age were 21, maybe he would never have committed this atrocity at all. Data shows us that 18 to 20 year olds commit gun homicides at a rate four times higher than adults 21 and older so we need to think long and hard why we are allowing them to purchase guns in the first place. These are not laws that would infringe on law abiding gun owners in any way. There is only one way to keep our children and teachers safe and that is through proactive measures to address access to guns. If someone has entered a school building and is shooting we have already failed and the burden cannot be placed on teachers to stop them.

[\(https://everytownresearch.org/report/preventing-gun-violence-in-american-schools/\)](https://everytownresearch.org/report/preventing-gun-violence-in-american-schools/)

As an Ohio resident, voter, parent, and teacher, I urge you to put our students and teachers first and not move forward with this bill.

Respectfully,
Sara Salsbury
Moreland Hills, OH