

Testimony on H.B. 99
Veterans and Public Safety Committee
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Submitted by:
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Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Veterans and Public Safety Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony in opposition to H.B. 99, regarding persons authorized to go armed within school safety zones. As a concerned citizen of Ohio, a parent of school age children, the husband of a teacher, and a U.S. Army veteran of multiple combat tours with firsthand experience in engaging armed assailants, I urge the committee members to vote NO on H.B.99, a bill that seeks to broaden the number of people who can carry firearms in school safety zones by eliminating the peace officer training requirement to do so. Rather than providing additional security for schools, this bill creates greater risk and places unreasonable expectations on educators to subsume the duties and responsibilities of law enforcement without adequate training to fulfill that role effectively or safely.

Law enforcement professionals and military personnel train relentlessly so that when the time comes they can act with speed and accuracy to defend themselves and others. Even then, doing it effectively without hesitation is not always a given. Taking a life, even in defense, is no easy task. Yet, the Ohio legislature is now proposing that educators – who more than most bear a natural disposition toward compassion, empathy, kindness, and love – can set aside that disposition and do what police and soldiers do, all with as little training as what a KFC cook gets to operate a pressure fryer – 18 hours of general training, plus a couple of hours of target practice.

Not only are the training requirements proposed insufficient in duration, they are insufficient in the type of training. Those who train to engage an armed assailant have to master a lot more than simple firearm mechanics. They train to neutralize threats as part of a team, working in tandem with other highly trained professionals, assessing optimal strategies based on the conditions,

mitigating danger to bystanders, minimizing casualties, and avoiding crossfire scenarios, among other tactical considerations. None of this kind of training is required by the proposed legislation. Even if it were, the very layout of school buildings prevents this type of fire-team response from educators who are already in their classrooms.

Thus, the unspoken assumption embedded in this bill is that teachers would act as lone defenders to stop an assailant. If previous school mass shootings are any indication, that assailant would likely be armed with the kind of weaponry that effectively neutralizes even trained law enforcement. As Texas Department of Public Safety Director Steve McCraw put it, there was little that police at Robb Elementary School could do against such “a barrage” in which “hundreds of rounds were pumped in four minutes into those classrooms.”

What the sponsors of H.B. 99 are proposing, then, is that an educator with no body armor, only twenty hours firearm basics, and no tactical training or experience can single-handedly stop an assailant laying down the kind of firepower that sidelined Uvalde’s trained police officers. With only two and a half workdays of training, H.B. 99’s sponsors presume that someone would be sufficiently equipped to demonstrate individual gallantry above and beyond their normal duty, at great personal risk to their own life. Members of the committee, on the battlefield these are the standards by which we award the Distinguished Service Cross or Medal of Honor. To presume this level of effectiveness and courage under fire on the basis of two and a half workdays of minimal training requirements is presumptuous at best.

You can’t have it both ways. You can’t, as this legislature has done with other bills, treat educators as too incompetent to make curriculum decisions about the very thing they have spent their lives mastering, while simultaneously assuming that they are so prodigious as to become Audie Murphy with just 20 hours of training.

What is far more likely, statistically, is that the weapon or weapons carried by those with inadequate training would become the unintended vehicles for accidental injury or death on campus, add to the arsenal of a potential attacker, or contribute to a hail of crossfire that escalates the already horrific body counts resulting from school shootings.

There are more serious conversations about school safety and guns to be had without indulging the Wild West fantasies of those who would turn our school classrooms into the O.K. Corral. H.B. 99 is an absurd proposition on its face, and it is shameful that this body has given it the level of legitimacy that it has. Our teachers have enough to deal with without having to worry about the increased risk environment that politicians would create for them by passing this bill, not because it's an effective solution, but because it provides political cover for the feckless inaction of politicians to do something more meaningful.