

May 30, 2022  
HB 99

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My Name is Sandra Fiehrer. I'm a mother of two, a gun owner and a community volunteer. I cannot believe that I have to keep submitting testimony against this dangerous bill today, while this entire nation is reeling from the tragedy of ANOTHER horrific gun massacre in an elementary school in Uvalde, TX. You could not be more appallingly tone deaf! Handling a firearm in a school safety zone should require extensive live training, that's why current law requires over 700 hours of training.

I'm a graduate of Columbus City Schools and I became an advocate for gun violence prevention years ago after I saw Congress and this state legislature refusing to address the rise of gun violence in schools. Today, you are still refusing, choosing instead to add to the risk. I'm beyond frustrated by the persistent and lethal disconnect between this legislature and the majority of Ohio constituents who support gun safety measures. Arming teachers won't solve this problem, gun safety will. Weak gun laws kill children, mothers and neighbors.

This legislative majority has bills to restrict books and curriculum. You don't trust teachers to select books in the classroom, but you insist they should have guns instead? It's infuriating that your legislative priority is to expand the use of guns in our schools while decreasing training requirements. Make no mistake, introducing more guns into schools actually increases the risk of gun violence. There have been numerous incidents already where a gun has been discharged by the staff on school grounds.<sup>1</sup> It is a fact that gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color negatively and schools in these communities will no doubt be similarly impacted. Everytown research has found that 64% of school mass shootings occurred in majority-minority schools. The nation's two largest teachers' associations, The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association oppose arming teachers.<sup>2</sup> The National Association of School Resource officers strongly oppose arming teachers due to the risk it would poses to law enforcement, students and the school community, as well as the risks to the armed teachers themselves.<sup>3</sup> Every teacher I know opposes allowing guns in schools, full stop. School safety experts agree.

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<sup>1</sup>Seltzer A, Winston H, Hitchcock O. Breaking: Man arrested in 2013 murder of Dreyfoos 1 school janitors. The Palm Beach Post. May 25, 2017. <https://pbco.st/2RE4R8V>. Schrott M. Officer accidentally discharges weapon at George Washington Middle School. Alexandria Times. March 13, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2BnC8zT>. See also: Everytown For Gun Safety. Gunfire on School Grounds. <https://bit.ly/2ZMXpj>

<sup>2</sup> <https://everytownresearch.org/report/preventing-gun-violence-in-american-schools/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.nasro.org/>

I'm alarmed for my friends who are teachers and my friends' children in school who will be forced to face even higher risks due to this proposed law. Everytown research shows that 58% of school mass shooters have a connection to the school. No teacher or staff member wants to be faced with shooting their own student.

HB99 would exempt teachers from the current state training requirement: basic peace officer training or 20 years of active duty as a peace officer. In 2 weeks, the concealed carry requirement disappears. Allowing armed personnel in schools with just 22 hours of training is a grave mistake that will cost lives. This law serves one purpose, to override the court decision against allowing this. This bill aims to nullify the Ohio Supreme Court decision against Madison Local Schools (in former Senator Coley's district) who wanted to pass a resolution to allow firearms in school safety zones without the required safety training. You're willing to put all Ohio students and staff at risk to appease ONE district. This will not reduce school shootings and the gun lobby attempts to justify these policies by invoking fear of active shooter situations. We've had enough of their fear mongering. Allowing untrained guns in schools creates more risk. There's no way 22 hours of training prepares you to face a mass shooter. This bill serves ALEC and the Ohio gun lobbyists who continue to push their dangerous legislation.

Arming civilians with less training than law enforcement officers is not an effective way to stop school shootings.<sup>4</sup> The veterans on this committee should be ashamed, supporting lawless guns in our communities. We've seen trained law enforcement unable to overtake an assailant with an AR-15 (Parkland, Buffalo, Uvalde). A gun in the classroom would not have stopped these mass tragedies. In 2019, I collected signatures to put background checks on the ballot. The effort was widely supported by neighbors including gun owners and gun dealers. Union Co, my home was poised to be one of the first 10 counties to reach the signature goal before Covid arrived. Research shows 90% of Ohioans support common sense gun laws like background checks.<sup>5</sup> Members of the majority remain loyal to lobbyists and PACS instead of listening to constituents who are teachers and parents. As my 81 year old Mom, also your constituent said: "this makes no sense." In March 2021, my daughter was at work when shooting erupted across the street, at Polaris Town Center. A month later my son left work at St. Ann's Hospital moments before a shooting occurred there. Every single day we're at risk for a close call. Why should children feel that in the classroom? Why should teachers be faced with that at work? Guns in the room, especially without extensive training increase the risk of deadly violence. Teachers are there to teach, not stand guard!

How is THIS your priority as our senators? We could be addressing the real problem by passing gun safety measures. Why do I have to keep spending my time writing

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<sup>4</sup>Rostker BD, Hanser LM, Hix WM, et al. Evolution of the New York City Police Department 2 firearm training and firearm discharge review process. Rand Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG717.html>. Published 2008

<sup>5</sup><https://www.wkyc.com/article/news/poll-says-90-of-ohioans-support-gun-background-checks/95-ea935860-d94f-4682-90a5-89bf9fb80b88>

testimony? I have talked about guns in classrooms and with many neighbors and Ohioans. I am furious that you ignore 90% of us to serve 10%. We can all see that you believe you are immune from accountability because you drew your own favorable unconstitutional maps and defied the Ohio Supreme Court to stay in power. Defying the Ohio Supreme Court seems to be your thing. We see you and we will vote for gun safety candidates up and down the ballot. That seems to be the only way we can be certain our schools, churches, mosques and groceries will be safer. November is coming.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I again urge you to vote no on House Bill 99.