

Testimony on House Bill 248
House Federalism Committee

Submitted by: Shannon Winnubst
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Chair Becker, Vice Chair Stoltzfus, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present testimony in opposition to HB 248. I am speaking to you today as a private, voting citizen who opposes this bill because it makes each and every one of us vulnerable to senseless gun violence. This bill makes every person in the State of Ohio less safe.

But I am also speaking to you as a faculty member at The Ohio State University. This bill would endanger the lives and health of every single member of The Ohio State University.

I begin with a simple question: what do you want The Ohio State University to be known for?? Do you want it to be known as a world-class university that is the pride of this state and educates our citizens to be the very best in every industry imaginable? Or perhaps you want it to be known as a place with many national championships in sports, especially football? If this bill is passed, you can cast those hopes aside. With this bill and its incredibly dangerous license for any student, staff or faculty member above the age of 18 to conceal carry a firearm on campus, The Ohio State University will go down in infamy with The University of Texas and Virginia Tech as the site of a mass shooting. Or maybe it will join the unnervingly long list of campuses in the United States where an angry, unstable student has grabbed a gun and killed their professor or peer. This the decision that is in your hands with this House Bill 248.

Let me tell you a little bit about my job. I have taught at universities (in Pennsylvania, Texas and Ohio) for almost thirty years. I have been at OSU since 2008 and, for the last five years, I have also been a department chair at Ohio State. Across this timespan, I have witnessed several profound transformations in college students. The one I want to bring clearly into focus for you today is that college students are more anxious than ever about their futures. College classrooms have become spaces for students to prove themselves, to memorize information, master knowledge, and conquer the highest possible GPA. They are deeply invested in accreditation, willing to add minors and majors and certificates and far more coursework in order to achieve the strongest possible form of accreditation. Why? Because they believe this is all a form of security: college students come to campus with the understanding that college is going to give them a more secure job, a more secure future, a more secure life.

This bill destroys all of that.

College students are walking time-bombs. They are, as a group, extremely highly strung. Especially as exacerbated by this massive economic crisis caused by Covid-19, students are profoundly anxious about whether they will be able to find a job—much less a career—that will give them a secure, middle-class life that most of them feel entitled to. They are under extreme pressure. Consequently, the smallest change in a course plan or a slightly lower-than-anticipated grade can set them off. I have students contact me in various forms of rage and despair

regularly. And what they want from me is directly related to the danger of this bill: they want me to fix a situation that they are convinced is wrong and unjust. When students contact the department chair, they do so to complain. They are often angry, upset, and volatile. I regularly send them to Counseling Services—sometimes quite literally walking them to the facility—to help to calm them down. And the number of students contacting department chairs in this manner is accelerating every year. It is not an overstatement to say that, when I reflect on the situation, The Ohio State University campus feels like a tinderbox to me.

This House Bill 248 is the match that could set that campus—and all campuses across Ohio—literally on fire. Mental health problems, whether diagnosed at Counseling Services or (more commonly) self-medicated with alcohol and drugs, are proliferating on our college campuses. The access to firearms will only intensify this instability and unleash violence on our campuses. You were elected to this public office to serve the people of Ohio. While we can all differ politically on what might make the lives of the people of Ohio “better,” the absolute bottom line and core commitment of your job is to be sure that all the people of Ohio are as safe and secure as possible. House Bill 248 directly undercuts that core commitment.

I implore you to oppose this dangerous bill. I implore you to stand up for the students, faculty and staff of The Ohio State University and for all college campuses across the state and oppose this dangerous bill.

Thank you and, as ever, Go Bucks!