



State Senator William P. Coley II
Senate Bill 317 Sponsor Testimony
Senate Judiciary Committee
May 27, 2020

Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you the opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 317, Exempt from training if allowed to go armed in school safety zone.

Senate bill 317 is all about local control. It is not up to politicians in Columbus to decide how to best protect each school district's children. This bill will merely give each board of education the option to allow teachers the opportunity to protect their students and themselves. This bill is not arming teachers or handing out firearms, it is giving school districts the freedom of choice. The school board can decide to authorize certain teachers to carry a firearm. Furthermore, the school board can also decide on the level of training that must be maintained for such authorization.

Now some of you are scratching your head saying didn't we handle this already? Yes we did. In 2016, we passed SB 199 which did all of those things. During the hearings on school safety issues we learned just how diverse Ohio's school districts truly are. We heard from urban school districts that can expect to see a police officer at their door in less than 2 minutes from the time they call. We also heard from rural school districts that do not expect to see a Sheriff's deputy in less than 30 minutes from the time of the emergency call. In fact, one school district has an arrangement with a local prison where armed corrections officers will come to the defense of the school since their response time the best available.

When we were preparing SB 199, we heard from police officers who showed that over 30 shots from a handgun could be fired in the time it would take an individual, two classrooms away to retrieve a firearm from a locked cabinet and confront the shooter. We discussed how people employed by a school as a resource officer would still be required to have law enforcement training. We crafted SB 199 so as to permit a school district to have trained volunteers to provide additional security in their schools. We believe that we got the language right and, then Attorney General, now governor DeWine agreed and he prepared an Attorney General opinion that provided school districts guidance on how to proceed should they decide that it was safer for the students to have trained volunteers to provide additional security in their schools. It is my understanding that Attorney General Yost agrees with this opinion.

Unfortunately, you can find “ambiguity “anywhere, if that is what you choose. We all recall a former President who stated, “It depends on what the meaning of the word "is" is.” A few years ago in Butler County, we had a student of Madison High School start shooting at his fellow students. After the shooting, the school district, which had a school resource officer present on the day of the shooting, authorized certain other trained employee volunteers to have a firearm present. When the case was appealed to the Twelfth District Court of Appeals, 2 of the 3 judges on the panel came to the erroneous conclusion that employee volunteers needed to complete law enforcement training. This bill reverses that erroneous ruling.

Mr. Vice Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 317. I can’t help but use this opportunity to put in a plug for Senator Hoagland’s SB 147 which creates a school marshal program and is far more comprehensive than this bill. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.