

Testimony on Senate Bill 317  
Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Submitted by:  
Wendy Van Ittersum

Chair Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to SB 317.

I am a resident of Ohio and a voter. I am also a pediatrician and a parent of two elementary school students. My reason for writing today is to express my opposition to SB317. This dangerous legislation would greatly reduce the training requirements for teachers who carry loaded handguns inside primary schools.

Current Ohio law mandates that all armed school employees complete either an approved basic peace officer training course (~728 hours of instruction) or have completed 20 years of active duty as a peace officer. SB317 would exempt teachers from this training and allow them to complete only 8 hours of training (6 of which could be online). This level of training is simply inadequate when we are talking about the lives of children and other school employees.

Arming teachers introduces new risks into schools. Those who have the greatest expertise in child health and safety - teachers and pediatricians - oppose allowing guns in schools. As a pediatrician, I regularly talk with families about safe gun storage; this means that ammunition and guns are both locked and stored separately. This should be no different in schools, and schools are not equipped to manage this safety risk. There are countless situations one can imagine that a teacher's gun gets into the hands of a student. Accidental child gun deaths are not a rare occurrence; so far in 2020 nearly one child per day has been unintentionally shot. I have personally cared for patients who have been accidentally shot, and the devastation these events bring is absolutely life changing and deeply tragic. There are numerous instances already reported of guns being accidentally discharged by staff on school grounds, as well as staff guns falling into the hands of students. An event like this would be catastrophic for our schools and those particular communities.

Insurance companies also recognize the potential disaster here; districts around the country have faced the reality that insurers would not cover such a dangerous practice. Others have declined to cover those schools altogether, and when insurers have provided coverage, they have increased premiums to balance the risk. In this incredibly

trying time for schools and teachers, we simply cannot ask them to take on this personal or financial burden.

Senate Bill 317 is irresponsible legislation that ignores the layers of complexity involved in enacting such a law, and introduces a profound level of unnecessary danger into classrooms.

I strongly urge you to oppose this legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration

Wendy Van Ittersum