

Testimony on House Bill 99
Criminal Justice Committee

Submitted by:
Deborah Cooper

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 99.

I am an Ohio resident and voter and a former teacher who has taught at all levels from kindergarten through 12th grade, as both a full-time and a substitute teacher.

Not only can I not imagine how arming teachers would make students safer, but I'm shocked that Ohio legislators would even consider a bill like HB 99, which would drastically reduce safety training requirements for teachers who carry loaded handguns inside elementary, middle and high schools.

Under current Ohio law, all armed school employees—including teachers, security guards, and special police—must either complete an approved basic peace officer training course, or have completed 20 years of active duty as a peace officer.

HB 99 would exempt teachers from this requirement, allowing school districts to employ armed personnel in schools with as few as eight hours of concealed carry training (six of which can be completed online)—or with no training at all, if firearms are not concealed when carried.

My son is a special education teacher who has recently moved back to Ohio from California, and his children are elementary students. I do not want my son to teach in any school that allows teachers to be armed (particularly without training or with inadequate training), nor do I want my grandchildren to attend such a school. I certainly would not teach in a school district that put such a low premium on student and staff safety.

Teachers understand that kids of all ages are impulsive and frequently do not consider the consequences of their actions. A teacher would need many more than one pair of eyes to monitor everything that happens in a classroom on a good day. What if a student gains access to a teacher's gun? And how can parents be sure that an untrained teacher, making a split-second decision, won't shoot one of their children by mistake?

Young people depend on adults to exercise restraint and wisdom. When adults

fail to consider the ramifications of the decisions they make, children suffer. We are currently traumatizing children with “shooter drills” while ignoring the elephant in the room – the greater likelihood that the shooter will not be an outsider, but rather a student, or even a teacher, who reacts impulsively out of fear or simply fires a weapon by accident. To ignore such real possibilities is irresponsible.

Further, as I understand it, the primary purpose of HB 99 is to amend ORC 109.78d to rescue the Madison Board of Education from a lawsuit based on a violation of the current version of the law. Please do not overrule the decision of the 12th District Court of Appeals. This bill appears to be an attempt to expand dangerous gun culture into our school safety zones and does nothing to increase safety in our schools.

For the sake of Ohio students and teachers, I urge you to vote no on HB 99.

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