



Ohio Judicial Conference

The Voice of Ohio Judges

HB 272 - Opponent testimony
House Government Oversight Committee
October 31, 2023

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and Members of the Committee:

The Ohio Judicial Conference has serious concerns with House Bill 272, which would allow for the carrying of deadly weapons into buildings that house court facilities.

As an initial matter, the Judicial Conference opposes any efforts to expand the accessibility of deadly weapons in or near court facilities. As we all know, courts are places where disputes are settled, where justice is administered, and where emotions can run high. Every day, court facilities are the sites of volatile, highly emotional proceedings: divorces, child-custody determinations, criminal sentencing in murder and gang-related crimes, competency determinations, employment disputes, and will/probate disbursements, to name just a few examples. And as happened in Jefferson County in 2017, judges can be targets: a common pleas judge there was shot in a targeted, ambush-style attack as he made his way into the county courthouse. While the attack happened outside the courthouse, and thankfully the judge survived and eventually fully recovered, imagine what could have happened had the gunman been permitted to carry a weapon inside the building. For these reasons alone, the Judicial Conference cannot support the allowance of weapons in any facility where a courtroom is located.

Speaking specifically to H.B. 272, we have additional concerns. First, the bill specifies that the exception to the prohibition against carrying firearms into a building that contains a courtroom does not apply if the building is a "courthouse" (see lines 89-90). However, the bill does not define "courthouse." Is it a building that houses only courtrooms? The seats of most county governments are housed in buildings called "courthouses," which contain not only court facilities, but also offices for other county agencies, such as the commissioners, auditor, treasurer, and recorder.

Second, the bill also provides that the exception to the handgun prohibition only applies when court is not in session. We question the practicality and logistics of how this would work. How is a person attempting to enter a building to know if court is in session? It would be extremely burdensome to require court employees to post a sign

on the door of the building every time a court is gaveled into session, and to remove the sign once the session ends. Additionally, if someone walks into the building with a gun while court is not in session, but is in the building when court goes into session, that person has just unwittingly broken the law. The individual's culpability should not depend upon factors that are outside of both their control and knowledge. It is much clearer to simply maintain the prohibition.

Finally, we are concerned that the bill would open the door to allowing more than just handguns into government facilities, but also automatic or sawed-off shotguns, explosive and incendiary devices, knives, and other weapons. Although the legislation applies to persons who have a valid concealed handgun license, the legislation uses the terms "deadly weapon" and "dangerous ordnance," which by statutory definition includes much more than just handguns. See R.C. 2923.11 (A) and (K).

I close my testimony by noting that even if these problems are addressed, the Judicial Conference will remain opposed to any efforts to expand access to carrying deadly weapons into structures that house court facilities.

I appreciate the opportunity to share these concerns with the Committee.