

To: Senate Education Committee  
From: Deborah Gordon Klehr, Senior Staff Attorney  
Nancy Potter, Staff Attorney  
Re: SB 1193  
Date: September 11, 2014

The Education Law Center is a non-profit legal advocacy and educational organization dedicated to ensuring that all of Pennsylvania's children have access to a quality public education.

Our work on school climate focuses on engaging the whole school community — teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members — in the creation of safe, positive environments. With almost forty years of experience working on school climate issues, we write to discuss our concerns with SB 1193, the bill permitting school employees such as teachers and support staff to carry firearms in schools. While we share your desire to ensure that our schools are safe places, arming teachers or other school personnel is not the appropriate way to do so.

We note that after holding hearings and receiving testimony from stakeholders statewide, the Pennsylvania House Select Committee on School Safety recently issued its final report, which provides a number of policy recommendations for improving school safety, including the expansion of proven school climate programs. Arming general school personnel such as teachers was explicitly not one of the recommendations (see page 53 of the report).

There is no evidence that arming school personnel increases school safety and there are many reasons to believe that such an option will put more of the school population – students, teachers, and other school personnel – at risk.

Nationally, arming school personnel is not a recommended practice. National School Safety and Security Services, a national school safety consulting firm, advises against arming teachers and school staff. According to NSSSS president Kenneth Trump, "School districts considering arming teachers and school staff with guns would take on significant responsibility and potential liabilities that I firmly believe are beyond the expertise, knowledge-base, experience, and professional capabilities of most school boards and administrators...Suggesting that by providing teachers, principals, custodians, or other school staff with 8, 16, 40, or even 60 hours of firearms training on firing, handling, and holstering a gun somehow makes a non-law enforcement officer suddenly qualified to provide public safety services is an insult to our highly trained police professionals and a high-risk to the safety of students, teachers, and other school staff."<sup>1</sup>

In 2013, Michigan's Governor Rick Snyder vetoed a bill that would have allowed gun owners, including teachers, to carry concealed guns in schools. All 21 Kent County superintendents signed a letter asking Governor Snyder to veto that bill. The superintendents said "Schools are no place for

guns...Schools are made safe through careful crisis planning, secure buildings and safety procedures that are regularly practiced.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, top state law enforcers in Ohio such as the President of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police, Ohio’s Public Safety Director, and Ohio’s Attorney General opposed a recent effort to arm teachers.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, school districts ought to be aware of the impact of arming personnel on their insurance premiums. Some insurance companies are declining coverage to schools that allow employees to carry handguns, or are raising their premiums. In Kansas, for instance, the liability insurance provider for about 90 percent of Kansas school districts said it would not cover schools that permit employees to carry concealed handguns. The Oregon School Boards Association, which manages liability coverage for most of the state’s school districts, now requires districts to pay an extra \$2,500 annually for every school personnel who carries a weapon at work.<sup>4</sup>

While we share your desire to increase school safety, we believe that there are better, safer measures than arming school personnel. We oppose allowing school personnel to carry firearms, especially absent training specific to the unique circumstances of a school. We also note that obtaining a license to carry a concealed firearm and maintain certification in the use of a firearm – the only qualifications required under SB 1193– are very minor safety protections. Each county has its own policies pertaining to who is granted a conceal-carry permit, but there are no minimum number of training hours required.

We support evidence-based school safety prevention measures such as School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports, Restorative Practices, increased mental health services, peer mediation, social and emotional learning, and Trauma Sensitive Schools.<sup>5</sup>

Thank you for your consideration. Please let us know if you have any questions. We can be reached at [dklehr@elc-pa.org](mailto:dklehr@elc-pa.org), (215) 346-6920, or [npotter@elc-pa.org](mailto:npotter@elc-pa.org), (412) 258-2127.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Implementation issues present school boards and administrators with significant responsibility and potential liability,” National School Safety and Security Services. Available at [http://www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/arming\\_teachers.html](http://www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/arming_teachers.html).

<sup>2</sup> Monica Scott, “West Michigan superintendents: Gov. Snyder, please veto bill allowing guns in schools,” *M Live*, December 17, 2012. Available at [http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2012/12/kent\\_county\\_superintendents\\_go.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2012/12/kent_county_superintendents_go.html)

<sup>3</sup> Julie Carr Smyth, “Ohio’s state school board urged not to arm teachers,” *News Channel Five*, May 14, 2013. Available at <http://www.newsnet5.com/dpp/news/education/ohios-state-school-board-urged-not-to-arm-teachers>.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Yavvino, “Schools seeking to arm employees hit hurdle on insurance,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 2013. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/08/us/schools-seeking-to-arm-employees-hit-hurdle-on-insurance.html?pagewanted=all&r=1&>.

<sup>5</sup> See Collaborative for Academic, *Social and Emotional Learning, Program Implementation: A Key to Success*. Available at [http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_Implementation.pdf](http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/CS_Implementation.pdf). And see Massachusetts Advocates for Children, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, A Report and Policy Agenda* (2005). Available at <http://www.massadvocates.org/order-book.php>. See also Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence’s December 2012 Connecticut School Shooting Position Statement, which advocates for an approach to safer schools, guided by four key elements: Balance, Communication, Connectedness, and Support, along with strengthened attention to mental health needs in the community, structured threat assessment approaches, revised policies on youth exposure to violent media, and increased efforts to limit inappropriate access to guns. Available at [http://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/Updated\\_Lists\\_1-8-13-OFFICIAL\\_FOR\\_DISSEMINATION-Connecticut\\_School\\_Shooting\\_Position\\_Statement\\_12-19-2012-2\\_pm\\_ET.pdf](http://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/Updated_Lists_1-8-13-OFFICIAL_FOR_DISSEMINATION-Connecticut_School_Shooting_Position_Statement_12-19-2012-2_pm_ET.pdf).