

Testimony of

**Christine Licata,
Pennsylvania Chapter Leader, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America**

Presented to
The Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee
in Opposition to Senate Bill 1193

September 16, 2014

On behalf of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, I want to thank Senator Folmer and the members of the Education Committee for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 1193, which would broadly expand the number of persons legally allowed to carry guns in Pennsylvania schools.

Moms Demand Action was founded by stay-at-home mom Shannon Watts on December 15, 2012, in response to the devastating shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Our organization quickly flourished into a leading force for gun violence prevention, with chapters in all 50 states and a powerful grassroots network of moms that has successfully effected change at the local, state and national level. In December 2013, Moms Demand Action partnered with Mayors Against Illegal Guns to unite a nationwide movement of millions of Americans working together as Everytown for Gun Safety with the goal of ending the epidemic of gun violence that affects every community in America. Our families have the right to be safe from gun violence – that’s why Moms from across the country have built a movement to strengthen gun laws and save lives.

In Pennsylvania, our Moms are educators, business owners, health care providers, stay at home moms, and gun owners. We are a nonpartisan, grassroots movement of American mothers demanding new and stronger solutions to lax gun laws and loopholes that jeopardize the safety of our children and families. We are concerned that school shootings have become our new normal, and we are saddened upon hearing story after story of terrified children cowering under their desks during “active shooter” drills. When we drop our kids off at school, we need to know that they will be learning math and science, not how to duck and cover.

The misguided and dangerous bill under consideration today, S.B. 1193, would make guns in schools more common, raising serious risks of gun accidents — or worse — in our children’s learning environments.

Under current law, it is generally a crime to possess a gun on school property¹ and only “School Police Officers” may carry firearms. These police officers are appointed by county courts (on the requests of the schools) and are clearly identified as law enforcement personnel: they must wear a uniform with a metal shield or badge that

¹ See 18 Pa. Stat. § 912.

clearly says “School Police” and must have completed the law enforcement certification for firearm use or previously graduated from the PA State Police Academy and served as a state trooper.² In school districts where administrators determine that armed security is necessary to preserve public safety, these highly trained law enforcement officers are the appropriate professionals to provide that security.

Senate Bill 1193 would alter this sensible balance by letting school districts choose to allow teachers and other non-uniform school personnel to tote loaded weapons in our classrooms. In particular, it would allow PA school districts to “establish policy permitting school personnel access to firearms” in schools or on school grounds. Any district policy adopted under S.B. 1193 would allow teachers or other personnel to carry into buildings and classrooms if they have a concealed carry permit and have completed one of various training courses. This would broadly expand the number of personnel who could be authorized by districts to carry or possess firearms in schools. As troubling as it is to contemplate guns carried in schools by educators who are not professional law enforcement, S.B. 1193 is even worse: it does not require school districts to provide parental notification if their child’s teacher is armed. As a result, parents would not know if their child is being sent into a classroom where a teacher has a gun hidden.

Aside from the fact that teachers and students overwhelmingly oppose allowing guns on campus, we've already seen evidence for why legislation like this is so dangerous just two weeks into the school year.

Last week, it was a Utah Elementary School teacher who shot herself in the leg in the school's bathroom. Two weeks ago an Idaho State professor shot himself in the foot during class. In both cases the educators were legally allowed to be carrying the firearms on school grounds thanks to dangerous state laws. Before Pennsylvania takes the same approach, it's worth considering a Utah Deseret News editorial written in the shooting's aftermath calling for repeal of the state law: "Schools would be safer without firearms present, even if carried by those with permits and no intent to do harm. It's time for Utah lawmakers to change the law."

Under existing Pennsylvania law, if a school or school district believes there is a need for armed security, there is a well-established procedure for hiring a trained law enforcement officer to provide security. Allowing non-uniform/non-security personnel to carry firearms will not increase security; it will increase the risks our children face in the classroom.

We can all agree that school security is important, but our focus should be on how dangerous people get guns in the first place. As Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said recently – the problem isn't a lack of school security, it's easy access to guns. A clear majority of K-12 school shootings since Newtown were perpetrated by minors, and

² See 24 Pa. Stat. § 7-778.

a large majority of shootings where the source of the firearm is known involve guns that were stored carelessly at home, which allowed a child to access them. In more than a third of school shootings since Newtown, at least one person was shot after an argument or confrontation at a school escalated and a gun was at hand.

We owe it to our nation's students to find ways to make educational institutions safe havens. School security is an important piece of this puzzle, but not the only one: we need to do more to encourage adult gun owners to store their firearms responsibly to keep them out of minors' hands, and we need to do more to keep guns from dangerous people from the start. These preventative steps should be our top priorities.

There is no silver bullet – no one thing will end the scourge of gun violence in America. But, there are common-sense steps we can take that we know will fix gaps in our current system and prevent gun violence from entering our schools and communities. Students and educators have a right to feel safe at school. Why are our elected officials content to make teachers and students the only line of defense between themselves and a gunman, while they do nothing to prevent these tragedies from happening in the first place? Arming our K-12 teachers is not the answer.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments on this misguided and dangerous bill. I urge you to reject this bill and focus instead on laws that will protect public safety rather than endangering children.