

Mr. Mark Zilinskas

Testimony on SB 1193

September 16, 2014

I would like to begin by thanking Senator White for his comments as well as taking time to listen to my thoughts and concerns last summer.

I would also like to thank the committee for having me here today.

My brief remarks here will take about the same amount of time it took the police to arrive at the Sandy Hook school. As I speak, please imagine that a child is being killed every 15 to 20 seconds, and think about how much we all would want someone to stop the murders more quickly."

I am here to support SB 1193. Let me tell you why.

The game changer for me was the Sandy Hook Elementary slaughter. Doesn't the word "slaughter" sound disgusting? A man came into that school on December 14, 2012 and slaughtered 20 children. Sadly, that is exactly what the event at Sandy Hook was on that day. A slaughtering made possible by current law and school policies. I would like you all to consider an unpleasant scenario. In fact, unpleasant is an understatement. I would like you all to consider a horrific scenario.

Imagine a group of first graders huddled together in front of a crazed killer (an animal with a gun) screaming and crying and saying things such as "I wish I wasn't here today". The next instant the killer says "Well you are here" and then he begins to shoot into the group of children killing them. If you were there, what would you do?

I think about this every single day before I go to school to teach mathematics. Is this going to be the day it's going to happen at Indiana Area High School? It probably won't but what if it does. It was probably wasn't even a thought in any teacher's mind on December 14, 2012 in Newtown, CT. Although I teach children who are 15-18 years old, trust me, it doesn't make it any easier to imagine a situation like the one I described above.

Our current laws, policies and plans are not good enough! In fact they are dangerous. They encourage killers to come to our schools because they know we cannot stop them. We have to wait until the police get there which is always going to be too late.

They were helpless and defenseless teachers and children who were being slaughtered or hiding at Sandy Hook Elementary. They were all waiting for someone to come and stop an evil animal from killing them. Some teachers acted to protect the children they were entrusted with. Six teachers died on that day trying to protect those children. Some teachers chose to run and hide. They took their children and locked doors and hid behind them waiting and waiting and waiting. All the while listening to the horrific sounds and events unfold. All the while knowing that if they were discovered and confronted by this

animal, they too and their children would be killed. They and their 6 year old children would be killed because they have no way to defend themselves. How did they feel knowing they were unable to stop the killer if discovered by him? How do they feel now knowing that they hid, knowing that they did not help the children who were killed? Fifteen minutes in that situation is an eternity. They now have a lifetime to think about thoughts like “what if I would have ran out and grabbed the gun off of him?” or “could I have done something to have stopped him and saved those children?”

Those are the choices we now have under current law, policies and procedures. I imagine locking my door listening to such sounds: gunfire, kids screaming and begging not to be killed. They are kids that I know and teach. My son is one of them.

I believe I would act. I would go towards the gunfire. I would try to stop an animal from slaughtering our kids. My kid. I would not be able to sit there and wait for the police to stop the animal. They would not be able to arrive in time. I would know that I would likely be shot and killed trying to stop the killer. I believe I would easily make the choice of confronting the killer and trying to stop him over hiding, hoping, and waiting. I couldn't live with myself knowing I did nothing to stop the slaughtering of kids I know and love.

The sad part of this is that I have the training to stop a killer in such a scenario but I do not have the tools. Sadly, current law, policies and plans forbid first responders like me from having the tools –a firearm - to stop a crazed killer. That has to change.

First Responders, people like me can be trained and equipped to stop a killer. I believe 10 states now have teachers trained and equipped to stop killers from killing their students. Pennsylvania needs to become another one of those states.

John Boener, owner and lead instructor of Tactical Defense Institute, is one of the leading instructors in the country in this area. He has one of the premier staffs and facilities in the country. In addition to training military and police officers, he offers courses designed specifically to train teachers and administrators on how to confront and stop these killers. He teaches teachers how to save the lives of their students. I believe there are over 30 districts in the state of Ohio who have teachers and administrators who have went through this training and who are now carrying the equipment (a firearm) necessary to stop a murderer from killing their students. I went through this training by attending the 3 day course at Tactical Defense Institute in West Union, Ohio.

At this point . . . after about five minutes . . . the police are now arriving at the Sandy Hook school, and 20 people are dead. Time is our enemy. We must prepare, we must train, we must make sure that the true first responders -- those who are there -- are able to stop a madman before it becomes a slaughter.

I would like to use the balance of my time to answer questions about my training and experience at Tactical Defense Institute.