

Date: March 2, 2018

TO: Senator Eichelberger, Majority Chair
Senate Dinniman, Minority Chair
Members
Senate Education Committee

FROM: Ted Kirsch, President
AFT Pennsylvania

RE: School and Student Safety Hearing, March 2

I am writing today to add AFT Pennsylvania's perspective to the Senate Education Committee hearing on ways to improve student and school safety.

Yet again, a mass shooting at a school has raised the nation's consciousness regarding school safety. However, school safety is about so much more than guns and mass shootings on school property.

Webster's dictionary defines *safety* as "the condition of being safe from undergoing or causing hurt, injury or loss." There are many ways that hurt, injury and loss can happen on school property, and national, state and local policies protecting students and employees are essential for ensuring that schools are safe.

However, one thing that will not improve school safety is allowing school staff to have firearms at school. Adequate school counseling and health services and manageable class sizes are essential to ensuring school safety and should be the debate in Harrisburg, not arming teachers.

Furthermore, placing more guns on school campuses will not solve the problems caused by the presence of guns of school campuses. The National Association of School Resource Officers strongly recommends against teachers carrying firearms to school. In addition, our national organization, the American Federation of Teachers, has published the following data regarding this issue:

- The FBI and other law enforcement agencies have increased the training requirements and resources—including specialized virtual reality devices—for their agents in order to deal with close-quarters shooting arrangements. [Kevin Johnson, "FBI Focuses Firearms Training on Close-

Quarters Combat," USA Today, Jan. 7, 2013, www.usatoday.com/story/news/2013/01/05/fbi-firearms-training/1811053/]

- Given the high degree of training needed for police officers to appropriately engage against armed assailants in close quarters, the former chairperson of the International Association of Chiefs of Police has recommended against arming staff or volunteers to protect schools, calling it a "distraction." [Scott Knight, Police Chief of Chaska Minnesota, Jan. 16, 2013., Testimony to the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, video recording at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?310413-1/gun-violence-prevention&start=6754>]
- Of shootings in emergency rooms in American hospitals, 23 percent are done with a weapon taken from an armed guard. The presence of armed guards who are not properly trained law enforcement officers may add to the danger at a school. [Gabor D. Kelen, Christina L. Catlett, Joshua G. Kubit, and Yu-Hsiang Hsieh, "Hospital-Based Shootings in the United States: 2000 to 2011," *Annals of Emergency Medicine* 60 (2012): 790-798, [www.annemergmed.com/article/S0196-0644\(12\)01408-4/abstract](http://www.annemergmed.com/article/S0196-0644(12)01408-4/abstract)]
- There are cases of successful civilian intervention in mass shootings that involve former police officers and military personnel. However, research into every mass shooting incident over the past 30 years found not one documented case of an otherwise licensed civilian successfully intervening during a shooting. [Mark Follman, "Do Armed Civilians Stop Mass Shooters? Actually, No," *Mother Jones*, Dec. 19, 2012, www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/armed-civilians-do-not-stop-mass-shootings]

Allowing certain employees to have their firearms at school will not only impact students' learning conditions, but will also greatly impact educators' working conditions. Pennsylvania is already experiencing a critical teacher shortage. Between 2011 and 2016, the Commonwealth saw a 64 percent decrease in the amount of instructional certifications issued. AFT Pennsylvania submits that allowing school employees to have their firearms at school will only serve to drive even more people from the teaching profession.

Gun violence in America's schools is a serious problem. Lawmakers must acknowledge that school safety is much broader than school shootings. Violence and bullying in schools all threaten the security of students and school staff. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2106*, a report published annually by the National Center for Education Statistics, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the American Institutes of Research, indicates that school bullying and violence have decreased in the recent past. Lawmakers must recommit to bullying and violence prevention measures already in place in Pennsylvania's public schools.

As the committee debates measures to enhance school security, please remember that schools should be places where students can thrive, and where teachers and staff can be successful. Thank you for your consideration.