

My name is Katie Lyles, I am a resident, citizen and public educator of Colorado representing CEA. I thank the Chair, and all members of this Committee for allowing me to testify before you today in opposition to HB 1168.

We are all here because we want the students in Colorado's public schools to be safe in their places of learning. I never thought much about school violence until my innocence was shattered on April 20' 1999 when I was a 16 year old sophomore in my classroom at Columbine High School and my classmates and a teacher were murdered. Others remain maimed or, like me, continue to live with the trauma of that event. The insight I gained from that day has taught me that violence met with violence only results in more tragedy. HB 1168 promotes vigilance by promoting more weapons of violence in our schools in the hope of creating a more non-violent environment. This is a bill about hand gun freedoms, disguised as school safety legislation. This is the wrong type of vigilance and the wrong conversation to be having if we want to solve the problem of school safety at its source.

The fact that this bill allows anyone who has a permit to bring a gun into a school is simply irresponsible. I am addressing specifically about what this would look like if teachers and staff were to have guns. I have been teaching for more than a decade in Jefferson County public schools, and I have first-hand knowledge of the realities of the classroom. Because of this, my voice is an authentic one, and one that I hope is heard. My experiences as a teacher and as a student who has experienced school violence first hand have shown me that HB 1168 is not a viable solution for a number of reasons.

First, I know that as a trained teacher our prime responsibilities are to usher kids into a safe place during an emergency drill and to absolutely remain with them. If my responsibility is to also pursue a perpetrator, the students that I am responsible for will be left unsupervised, unattended and unsafe.

Second, the reality of any classroom teacher having a gun on his or her person would introduce the real possibility of the gun getting into the wrong hands. Students are around me all the time throughout the day, be it a small group demonstration, one on one work, or a simple hug in the hallway. If I were to be carrying a loaded weapon, all of these commonplace scenarios would no longer be safe since the weapon would be accessible to others.

And who should be liable for the consequences of unforeseen injury or death if the gun of a teacher or staff member gets into the wrong hands, or is used by the teacher and results in injury or death of an innocent student, other teacher, or law enforcement officer? Should it be the teacher's liability? The schools? The district? Certainly, any legislation allowing anyone other than a trained law enforcement officer to have possession of a gun in our schools should include provisions of strict liability against anyone who uses or owns a gun knowingly brought into our public schools.

Third, law enforcement and persons currently authorized to have guns inside of our schools have to go through repeated and updated training and assessment directly related to the presence and use of a gun in situations relating to dealing with persons having issues with mental health, threatening other individuals, crowd control, etc. Since a teacher with a gun would be a special person of trust and expected to act at the same level as a policeman, then should not such training be replicated and required of all teachers carrying or having access to guns in our public schools. I assume that the trainings would be intensive and on-going, which brings up logistical and financial questions of when, where, and who would fund the training.

Regardless of all of these very real and valid points, another reason to vote down this bill is to stop forcing attention away from the real issues that will solve the problem at its source, i.e. prevent a person of violence from being in the school in the first place. HB1168 promotes the wrong conversation because it is reactive and assumes that people of violence will continue to enter our schools...and then we ask, "How will we react?"

For the sake of our students, we can do better than this. What I want to see is a conversation that focuses on finding real long-term solutions that prevent violence from even entering the doors of a school. We need legislation that focuses on an increase in mental health resources, provides common sense gun legislation, and places non-violent security measures into schools to make entry into the building safe. Until such legislation is afforded and passed, we are failing our students.

For these reasons, please vote no on HB 1168.