

Legislation Text

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Urging the Pennsylvania Legislature to reject Senate Bill 383, which would permit school personnel to carry concealed firearms in schools.

WHEREAS, On February 15, 2017, Senator Donald White introduced Pennsylvania Senate Bill 383, which would permit school personnel to carry concealed firearms in schools. The only requirements for carrying a firearm in school under Senate Bill 383 would be: a license to carry a concealed firearm and a basic certification in the use of a firearm; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Senate and House have both studied the issue of allowing school personnel to carry firearms and found it not advisable. The Pennsylvania House Select Committee on School Safety explicitly stated in 2014 that it did not recommend arming general school personnel. In the same report, testimony from state agencies, law enforcement, education groups, and district attorneys led the Select Committee to recommend that only school police officers or security officers be armed on school property. An Advisory Committee on Violence Prevention, formed at the direction of the State Senate, echoed the conclusions of the House Select Committee when it wrote in its 2014 report: "Police officers undergo extensive training in the use of their weapons and teachers do not. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect a teacher to have the same firearms competency as a law enforcement officer, and not sound policy to assign such responsibility to a teacher"; and

WHEREAS, The Police Chief of Susquehanna Township, Robert A. Martin, raised skepticism about the potential consequences of arming school staff who have not received the same extensive situational training as police officers. Martin noted that police departments dedicate "a lot of time and a lot of effort and a lot of hours, and it's ongoing, in the training of our law enforcement officers to meet those legal, physical and mental thresholds to use deadly force"; and

WHEREAS, National School Safety and Security Services (NSSSS), a consulting firm focused on issues related to school safety, also recommends against arming school personnel. Citing the minimal training requirements that are often proposed under such laws, NSSSS president Kenneth Trump stated that armed staff in schools pose a "high risk to students, teachers, and other school staff"; and

WHEREAS, Multiple statewide education policy advocates, including the Pennsylvania State Education Association and the Education Law Center of Pennsylvania, have written letters calling for this measure to be rejected; and

WHEREAS, Arming school personnel can even affect school district insurance policies. Recognizing the potential risk posed by an increase in the number of firearms in school, some insurance companies are declining

coverage to school districts that allow employees to carry handguns, while others are raising premiums, according to the Education Law Center; and

WHEREAS, On August 25, 2016, an elementary school teacher in Chambersberg, PA removed the pistol she was carrying to use the restroom and forgot it on top of the toilet. At least four children ages 6 through 8 used the same restroom during the 3 hours in which the teacher's gun was left unattended. This anecdote highlights the great risk posed by an increase in the number of firearms in schools. Accidents happen, and arming minimally trained school personnel will almost certainly result in more firearm-related accidents in Pennsylvania schools; and

WHEREAS, The Education Law Center has stated that attacks by students "are often the result of unaddressed bullying, trauma, or mental health issues, and we support evidence-based school safety prevention measures that deal directly with those root causes such as School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports, Restorative Practices, increased mental health services, peer mediation, social and emotional learning, and Trauma Sensitive Schools." Rather than arming school staff, an effective strategy for addressing the issue of gun violence in schools must be centered around effective social interventions aimed at preventing the violence before it occurs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Council hereby urges the Pennsylvania Legislature to reject Senate Bill 383, which would permit school personnel to carry concealed firearms in schools.