

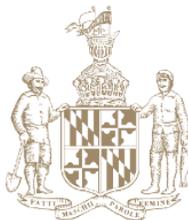
JARED SOLOMON  
Legislative District 18  
Montgomery County

Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

Education and Economic Development

Oversight Committee on Personnel



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 222  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
301-858-3130 · 410-841-3130  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3130  
Fax 301-858-3233 · 410-841-3233  
Jared.Solomon@house.state.md.us

## THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### Favorable Testimony – HB 1078 - No Funding for Firearms Act

#### House Appropriations Committee

February 27, 2020

Chair McIntosh and Distinguished Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views on HB 1078 – the No Funding for Firearms Act.

The bill before you today is the same bill the Appropriations Committee approved last session 15-7 and the House of Delegates passed 95-44.

This bill is simple and straightforward and in many ways merely codifies current practice into law. The bill says school boards and public schools cannot spend any money from any source including local, state, federal, or private sources to directly or indirectly provide a teacher with a firearm or train a teacher in the use of a firearm. The bill contains an exception for school approved clubs or sports.

Unfortunately, because of the position of the Federal Department of Education and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, we find ourselves as a state government needing to clarify policy. Why is this clarification necessary? In 2015, an update of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA, was passed into law. ESSA contained a new funding source called the Safe Schools and Academic Enrichment Grant in Title-IV(A) of the law. This grant funding, distributed by formula to each local school district, can be used for a variety of different areas including STEM programs, counseling, school technology, and activities that support safe and healthy students.

That last category is intended for things like mental health supports, programs addressing drug and substance abuse, and drop-out and bullying prevention. While the ESSA law provides for lots of “allowable uses” it does not specifically prohibit funding. Last August, when Secretary DeVos was asked by members of Congress whether this grant could be used to arm teachers responded by writing:

*“Let me be clear: I have no intention of taking any action concerning the purchase of firearms or firearms training for school staff...”*

That same week Frank Brogan, Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education said that *“arming educators is a good example of a profoundly personal decision on the part of a school or a school district or even a state.”*

In December 2018, the Department of Education released the final report of the Federal Commission on School Safety, which praised examples of states and districts that have programs to arm teachers and even suggested various funding streams that could be used for that purpose. When asked about the report, Adam Skaggs, chief counsel at the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence said *“Does the report endorse the use of federal dollars to train teachers to carry and use guns in schools? I think the answer is unquestionably yes.”*

As the General Assembly, our duty is to make it clear our state has no intention of allowing schools to spend their money on firearms or firearm training for their teachers. While it is unlikely the Maryland State Department of Education would allow a school to use their funds for these purposes, we cannot leave that decision to chance nor open to legal interpretation.

In recent legislative sessions, this body has made tremendous progress in protecting Marylanders with sensible gun safety legislation. My bill continues that tradition. As lawmakers, we need to ensure that our teachers are focused on lesson planning and academics, not target practice and weapons training.

Our state has invested significantly in school safety upgrades and active shooter trainings. Schools also have the option of using school police or school resource officers that are armed. There is nothing in this legislation that would discontinue or jeopardize these policies.

As a former high school teacher, I would not have wanted to worry about a firearm in my classroom or in a neighboring classroom. I would not have wanted students to worry that their teacher was armed, detrimentally changing the school environment. If God forbid there was an incident in my building, I would have wanted a highly trained law enforcement official to handle the situation.

Teachers across the country agree. In a 2018 poll conducted by the National Education Association, the nation’s largest teacher’s union, 72% say arming school personnel would be ineffective at preventing gun violence in schools, 82% say that would not carry a gun in school, and even among NEA members who own guns, 62% say they would not agree to be armed in school. Most importantly, two thirds of educators surveyed say they would feel **less safe** if school personnel were armed. A CNN Poll conducted after the tragedy at Sandy Hook showed the same results.

Our school districts should be investing their limited resources in places that actually help their students like increased mental health and academic supports. Let’s put this issue to bed once and for all by passing HB 1078. **I urge a favorable report for this legislation and I thank you for your time and consideration.**