

HB 1337**Rep. Ben Koppelman- Testimony**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank You for the opportunity to introduce HB 1337 to you today.

As many of you are aware, North Dakota law, like many states, restricts weapons in the school. This premise is based on the idea that an absence of weapons in school results in school safety. Unfortunately, there is an increasing amount of school violence nationally (including mass shootings) that occur each year despite the law. Each of these events includes a perpetrator illegally bringing a weapon into the school with the intent of doing harm.

Most schools are by definition, soft targets in that they are weapon free (or so we think) with exception of a student resource officer. Statistically soft targets are at higher risk of being targeted for violence due to the lack of resistance. We lock our school doors and attempt to control guest access by requiring guests check-in at the office. We may install cameras or other surveillance devices so that we know when something is going down, but we have limited measures in place to prevent something from happening.

We assume that law abiding citizens within the school building are unarmed because of the infraction in law, but have no idea if potential criminals are armed. By definition, criminals are not likely to pay attention to an infraction. In most schools, we have no way of knowing who is armed and who is not, but we do know that it is much more likely that the good guys follow the law as opposed to the bad guys.

I understand and agree with the idea that students should not be allowed to be armed. I understand the desire to keep security policy and decisions local. That is why I wrote this bill the way I did. HB 1337 would require school districts to prioritize school safety by requiring them to spend at least 15% of their annual state aid payments that they receive on school safety. It also goes on to provide a provision that that percentage can be reduced to a third of that amount or 5% if measures are take to eliminate the soft target (gun free zone) status through a locally approved policy. By definition, that is local control.

If a district would like to pursue that lower percentage mandate, they could do so by simply passing policy that would allow those that are not otherwise precluded from possessing a weapon to carry, excluding students. This policy could limit carry to areas where that individual is otherwise allowed to be, again excluding students.

By definition, this would make the school less of a soft target (no longer a gun free zone). Statistically, this would make the school less likely to be attacked. Now I understand that not everyone will like that policy, and that is why it is a local decision. However, short of that action, it is of uttermost importance that local districts fortify their schools, because it is the only line of defense for our children.

I'm not sure if the percentages in this bill are right and I am open to changing or capping them, but I believe the policy is solid.

I'm sure you will hear from some in opposition that they are already providing an adequate amount of resources for school security. They will say that school safety is important to them. To that I would say, prove it.

Several years ago, I was told that you could tell ones' priorities simply with two pieces of information, their day planner and their checkbook. (For all of you young people, that might be your Instagram page and your Apple Pay account 😊) If we look at a schools spending and the amount of time spent on school security would we believe that school safety is more important than basketball, football, or all sports combined. Where would it fall on the priority list?

It is not my goal to have districts called on the carpet based on their apparent priorities based on their spending, but rather I'm attempting to emphasize the importance of school safety from the state's perspective and then allow the schools to decide how best to spend that portion of state aid money.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I'm happy to work with the committee to fine tune the amount of the school security mandate, but lets amend this bill if needed and send this important policy to the floor with a Do-Pass recommendation. I'll be happy to attempt to answer any questions that you may have.