

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.