



Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide non-partisan non-profit focused on improving the lives and experiences of Maryland's children through policy change and program improvement. Our multi-issue platform helps us to improve the entirety of children's worlds—the systems they touch, the people they interact with, and the environment where they live.

HB725 – School Employees – Handgun Permits and Carrying Weapons on School Property

House Judiciary Committee
March 15, 2016

OPPOSED

Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) is committed to making every school in Maryland a safe place where young people can thrive both academically and emotionally. ACY strongly opposes HB725 because it allows local school boards to authorize school employees to carry handguns on school property, putting our children in the presence of dangerous weapons every single day.

Guns in schools do not make children safer. A child or teen is injured from guns every 30 minutes, according to the Children's Defense Fund. The Nationwide Children's Hospital reports that 1,500 children die from guns each year. Guns have been the second-leading cause of death among children and teens ages 1-19, and the number one leading cause of death among black children and teens.¹ School staff should be protecting students from harm, not increasing their risk of gun-related injuries and death.

It is unacceptable to authorize public school employees to carry handguns. The bill offers no definition for the term "school employee," nor does it reference a definition from elsewhere in statute or regulation. It is thus unclear which employees would be allowed to carry guns around our children. Moreover, there is no indication that such gun-carrying school employees would be identified, so parents might never know which adults in the building were armed on a given day. With guns hidden in schools, parents would have no ability to protect their children from armed educators, administrators, custodians, groundskeepers, and coaches who interact with their children on a daily basis.

The public has heard accounts and seen videos of adults losing their tempers and reacting aggressively to student misbehavior and of students being threatening or combative. With the presence of a handgun, these incidents that now devolve into yelling and shoving could become deadly.

Families should not be forced to choose between a public education and protecting their children's lives. This legislation will hamper efforts to improve school climate and ensure that school buildings are safe, nurturing places for to young people learn and grow.

For the reasons stated above, we urge an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB725.

¹ Children's Defense Fund. "Protect Children Not Guns 2013," available at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/campaigns/protect-children-not-guns>