



August 22, 2023

The Honorable Rep. Cameron Sexton
Speaker, TN House of Representatives

The Honorable Rep. Ryan Williams

The Honorable Sen. Randy McNally
Lieutenant Governor and Speaker, TN Senate

The Honorable Sen. Paul Bailey

The Honorable Jon Lundberg
Chairman, Senate Education Committee

RE: Opposition for HB7086/SB7019

As a collective of teachers, parents, students, education leaders, and community members of diverse backgrounds from across all three Grand Divisions in the State of Tennessee, we are writing to express our strong opposition to [HB7086/SB7019](#) which will be considered by the Tennessee General Assembly during the August 2023 Special Legislative Session on public safety.

HB7086/SB7019 would allow a person employed by a local education agency (LEA) as a faculty or staff member at a school within the LEA to possess and carry a concealed handgun on the grounds of their school at which the person is assigned. Additionally, this bill establishes requirements for faculty or staff members to possess and carry concealed handguns on the grounds of the school, and states that an LEA is immune from claims for monetary damages that are related to a faculty member's use of, or failure to use, a handgun at school.

Earlier this year, Nashville tragically lost the lives of three nine-year old students and three adults at The Covenant School. This tragedy has not only left our state in mourning, grieving for the preventable loss of life in our community, but also highlights the need to employ evidence-based strategies to create safer schools, which must include removing guns from schools to protect our children. What happened in Nashville is not an isolated incident. In 2022, we saw a surge of gun-related violence and death in schools across the state from [Murfreesboro](#), to [Knoxville](#), [Memphis](#), and beyond. A recent Tennessee Department of Health [study](#) showed firearms are the leading cause of death in Tennessee kids, an alarming rate that is 36% higher than the national average.

Gun violence will not stop if we arm teachers and other staff members in our schools. There is ample evidence that increased access to guns does not make schools safer. According to [Giffords Law Center](#), armed adults frequently mishandle guns in schools. Their study shows that there have been nearly 100 publicly reported incidents of mishandled guns in schools over the last five years, including a case where a teacher [unintentionally](#)



[fired a gun](#) in class during a safety demonstration, and a loaded gun [falling out of a teacher's waistband](#) while on the playground. Their findings show that armed staff does not decrease the number of school shooting incidents, but rather increases students' exposure to gun violence in schools.

The safety and well-being of all students in Tennessee is a top priority for us. However, creating safe learning environments through school hardening policies, including arming our schools' faculty and staff, is not the answer. A positive school climate results from building strong teacher-student relationships, creating a culture of belonging, and fostering a supportive learning environment for social and emotional growth. Creating a safe school community requires us to take steps to protect students' from physical harm. Increasing students' proximity to guns inside their classrooms would unnecessarily exacerbate the risks, threats, and the potential for more deadly outcomes across our state. Further, since carrying a concealed gun is confidential and barred from public inspection, parents would lack critical knowledge for their students' safety and have no say if their children were close to staff carrying concealed guns.

Allowing teachers and staff to carry concealed guns is not a solution to address gun violence in our schools. Tennessee has some of the least restrictive gun laws and one of the nation's highest rates of gun-related deaths. Creating new policies to loosen restrictions on guns in our school communities will only create further mechanisms to endanger the lives of our youngest Tennesseans.

Sincerely,

The undersigned Tennesseans