



TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony on Assembly Bill 843: Firearm Education in High School

Thank you members of the Assembly Committee on Education for allowing me to speak on this important bill today and how it will benefit the citizens of Wisconsin.

Firearms are not going away. This country was founded on the principles of freedom and in order to safeguard those principles and rights, the founders made sure that the second amendment was very clearly defined that this right shall not be infringed. However, we cannot expect to have an educated populace if we don't actually educate our youth on not only that their right exists, but how to safely utilize it.

This bill would require the state superintendent of public instruction to develop a curriculum for a comprehensive firearm education course for high school pupils. It would remain in the hands of each school board to decide if they did not want to offer this course. The course would focus on the types and mechanics of firearms as well as the different types of ammunition. Additionally, the course would focus on the principles of firearm safety, including safety devices, how to safely load and unload a firearm, safely carry a firearm and how to safely transport a firearm.

Some critics of this bill have said that we should not educate kids on firearms because it could be dangerous. This is ridiculous. We educate youth on drugs and sex. We certainly don't want kids to try heroin or to have unintended pregnancies. Education is key to safety in almost every aspect of life. It provides us with knowledge in a safe environment to explore our questions without getting hurt.

Additionally, in this state we often see an urban versus rural divide on many things, including firearms. For people who are thinking that it's the parent's job to teach about firearms, there are many families that might not have firearms. This deepens the divide in our state because many people in the rural areas are hunters and pass this tradition down for generations, while many kids growing up in the city or even suburbs may have never even seen a firearm.

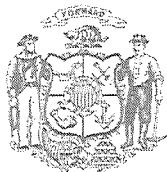
With a record number of 23 million guns sold in 2020, according to Small Arms Analytics, and the continuous calls for more awareness when it comes to guns, this bill is an important aspect of continuing our strong commitment to our constitution.



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Again, I appreciate your time and consideration of this important legislation and look forward to your questions.



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Senator André Jacque
January 12, 2022*

Chair Thiesfeldt and Members of the Assembly Committee on Education,

Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify before you in support of Assembly Bill 843, which establishes the development of a comprehensive firearm education curriculum for high school pupils.

Lack of knowledge regarding safe handling of firearms has led to accidental firearm discharges resulting in injury or death due. Recognizing this, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress put this idea before all Wisconsin citizens during the 2021 DNR Spring Hearings, which had their second highest turnout in the past two decades and offered both in-person and online options. Approximately 82% of Wisconsin residents who expressed an opinion (7,497 to 1,662) supported the proposal.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 843.



Department of Public Instruction

Statement for Information on Assembly Bill 843

Thank you, Chairman Thiesfeldt and committee members, for the opportunity to provide information and items for consideration in relation to Assembly Bill 843 (AB 843) on behalf of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). We would like to highlight a few areas the committee may want to give additional consideration to as you move forward with your committee discussions on this proposal.

Unlike similar proposals in the past, AB 843 requires local school boards to provide a resolution from the majority of their members if they choose not to offer this course. This all comes at a time when there are growing expectations for districts to expand elective offerings of all kinds, which can be particularly challenging for smaller rural districts which are likely declining in enrollment. Many of these districts face significant challenges around staffing.

The bill also requires DPI to work in conjunction with the Department of Natural Resources and others to develop curriculum for a Comprehensive Firearm Education course. The jointly developed curriculum would be required to incorporate specific provisions as outlined in the bill. The instruction in the school must be provided by an individual who has completed Concealed Carry Firearm Training. An important item to note here is that anyone teaching the curriculum is subject to the same licensing requirements that apply to any teacher in a school, including the requirement to be licensed by the DPI in addition to the requirement for the individual to have training under Wis. Stat. § 175.60.

Another item to consider is should comprehensive firearm education be its own elective course or embedded in another course like physical education? Would there be sufficient curricula to fill the space for an entire elective course, as an example – Hunters safety education consists of 10 – one hour classes, for a total of 10 hours of seat time.

The next piece to think about is the curriculum development. As a local control state, curriculum in Wisconsin is a local decision. There have been few instances where the DPI has been directed to develop model curricula. Recent examples would include bullying prevention and human growth and development. In both of those instances, the DPI developed the model curriculum and school districts may use it as is, customize it, or choose their own. It may be worthwhile for the Committee to discuss if new curriculum needs to be created or if there are existing resources educators currently use.

The DPI has proactively designed an online resource sharing platform called WISELearn. It provides a centralized location for classroom resources for educators. WISELearn is a free

portal that brings lesson plans, quizzes, classroom activities, and curriculum all into one searchable location, giving educators across the state the ability to share high quality resources. There are currently thousands of resources that have been curated and are available with topics ranging from American Indian studies to computer science and many topics in between.

One suggestion might be that instead of creating all new curriculum, we tap into the resources here in this room to share their materials on WISELearn. This would allow educators and local school boards to choose from those resources in a way that meets the needs and interests of their students and the time they have available to devote to that course work.

DPI is willing to be a partner in that and make available via WISELearn any resources – including materials from Hunter’s safety, 4-H or technical colleges that already offer instruction on firearms. While providing access to WISELearn and other resources is a similar strategy to optional model curricula, it may be a more practical, flexible, and cost-effective approach.

It is important to note, for many years traditional courses like driver's education have moved out of schools. At the same time, policy makers have expressed growing interest in instructional time for areas or interests that traditionally were part extracurricular activities. The reality is that there is a fixed amount of instructional time in a school year and adding new courses will generally displace existing offerings.

To be clear, DPI supports exposing students to a wide array of activities and interests. We also understand the issues surrounding guns and schools are complex and emotional. Balancing safety, proper training, and community needs are decisions best made locally and allowable under current law.