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February 6, 2024

Senator Dave Murman, Chair, and Members of the Education Committee
State Capitol, Lincoln, NE

RE: LB1339 (Brewer) – Change Provisions Relating to Possession of Firearms in Schools

Oppose: *Please include this written testimony from the League of Women Voters of Nebraska as part of the public hearing record for LB1339.*

Dear Senator Murman and Members of the Education Committee:

The League of Women Voters believes that the proliferation of handguns in the U.S. is a major health and safety threat to its citizens. Nationally, the League has endorsed the organization March for Our Lives and “advocates for the active role of government and social institutions in preventing violent behavior.”¹ While the intention of this bill is to improve the safety of students on school grounds, the habitual presence of firearms is a safety threat itself and impacts the ability for students to be academically successful.

From a physical safety standpoint, additional firearms have not eliminated violence and, in some cases, have had the opposite effect. The Violence Project in 2021 studied 133 school shootings and found that a quarter of these schools had at least one armed guard on the premises at the time of the shooting.² These shootings did not have fewer injuries or fatalities; instead, this group saw on average three times as many deaths. Not only does adding a firearm to the environment invite the possibility of human error, but often shooters are actively suicidal, which makes a location with an armed staff member more of an incentive than a deterrent.³ Even if there is not a plan or intention to hurt someone, it has been shown that the presence of guns makes violent situations more lethal.⁴

In the sometimes emotional and volatile environment of a confrontation at school, the presence of a firearm could quickly take a minor conflict to a tragic one. The escalation of a non-violent incident to a violent encounter could also further contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline,⁵ experiences that disproportionately impact students of color and disabled students.⁶

In addition to not aiding in student safety, this proposal could have impacts on student success and school function. Academically, continual presence of law enforcement has been shown by the Texas Education Research Center to have negative effects on student performance such as reduced graduation rates (around 2.5%) and lower college enrollment (around 4%).⁷

Functionally, while we appreciate the recognition of local control, if a governing board chooses to implement a policy, we are concerned about the fiscal and administrative impact. For example: who pays for training? Are weapons and ammunition provided? If an accident occurs, who is liable? There are too many significant unanswered questions.

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska believes that although the presence of armed individuals is intended to protect students, they instead pose a risk and may make it harder for students to learn, all while presenting our schools and taxpayers with an unneeded burden.

Please do not advance LB1339 to General File. Thank you for considering our position and for all you do for our state.

Sincerely,

Rachel Gibson, Vice President-Action, LWVNE
Sara Lee, Social Policy Action Team, LWVNE
Krystal Fox and Cat Henning, Social Policy Co-Directors, LWVNE
MaryLee Moulton, Co-President, LWVNE

¹Impact on Issues: A Guide to Public Policy Positions of the League of Women Voters. (2022-2024), p. 153. https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/LWV_ImpactOnIssues2022-2024.pdf

²Esposito, L., & Yablon, A. (2023, August 14). Do armed guards prevent school shootings? The Trace, para. 5. <https://www.thetrace.org/2023/08/guns-armed-guards-school-shootings/>

³Ibid, para. 5.

⁴Braga, A. A., Griffiths, E., Sheppard, K., & Douglas, S. (2021). Firearm instrumentality: Do guns make violent situations more lethal? *Annual Review of Criminology* (Vol. 4). 3. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-criminol-061020-021528>

⁵Susalla, A. (2023, July 24). School resource officers: Is police presence in schools doing more harm than good? Cato Institute. <https://www.cato.org/blog/school-resource-officers-police-presence-schools-doing-more-harm-good#:~:text=Weisburst%20found%20that%20increased%20police,encouraging%20administrators%20or%20parent%20monitors>

⁶Noel, R. (2023, September 1). A new state law requires schools to have armed guards. But many are having a hard time hiring officers. Houston Public Media. <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/politics/2023/09/01/461167/a-new-state-law-requires-schools-to-have-armed-guards-but-many-are-having-a-hard-time-hiring-officers/>

⁷Weisburt, E. K. (2018, November). Patrolling public schools: The impact of funding for school police on student discipline and long-term education outcomes. Texas Education Research Center. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED612423>