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SPOTLIGHT

## Central Bucks students applaud state senator's opposition to teacher gun bill

By Freda R. Savana, staff writer 4 hrs ago



Art Gentile / Photojournalist

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State Sen. Charles McIlhinney Jr. speaks with Central Bucks middle and high school students at his Doylestown Borough office on Wednesday, May 31, 2017. They wanted to meet with him to ask the senator to oppose Pennsylvania Senate Bill 383, which proposes to allow school boards to decide if employees could bring guns to school to enhance security.

Their message: Guns don't belong in schools.

"It's a waste of money, resources and time and a liability ... it's backward logic," Sophia Rubin, a 16-year-old Central Bucks East High School student told state Sen. Charles McIlhinney Jr. on Wednesday at his Doylestown Borough office.

About nine Central Bucks students relayed similar messages during their meeting with McIlhinney about Senate Bill 383, an amendment to the Public School Code that would give a school board the discretion to set up a policy allowing "school personnel access to firearms" in school buildings or on school grounds.

"I would not feel safe if teachers were armed," said Clarissa Rubin, 14, a student at Tohickon Middle School and Sophia Rubin's sister.

"It's unnecessary," added Rachel Griffiths, 13, who also attends the school in Plumstead.

The students were pleased to learn that McIlhinney, a Republican who represents the 10th Senatorial District in Bucks County, opposes the legislation.

Although he said he believed an armed teacher would have saved lives in the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut that left 20 children and six adults dead, McIlhinney said a law that would allow the arming of Pennsylvania's teachers would not be the right thing to do.

"Your logic is the same logic I came up with," he said, receiving applause from the students. "The whole thing is flawed logic. I'm not supporting Senate Bill 383."

The bill's prime sponsor is state Sen. Donald C. White, a Republican from the 41st Senatorial District in Armstrong, Indiana County, and parts of Butler and Westmoreland counties. McIlhinney said he doesn't anticipate the bill passing, saying that Gov. Tom Wolf has said he would veto it, should it reach his desk.

A recent amendment to the bill requires that school personnel granted access to guns must have a license to carry a concealed firearm and must maintain a current level of firearms training. Another amendment would protect the identities of school personnel who are allowed to carry a firearm by exempting them from disclosure either under the state's Right to Know law or during a public meeting.

Such amendments to the bill, said McIlhinney, "were not enough to change my vote."

The students, all members of a new youth committee of the Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition, are learning how to be "good, nonpartisan advocates for an issue they care about," explained Tam St. Claire, president of the coalition.

McIlhinney said he was impressed with how quickly the students learned about the Senate bill and that they had met with him to share their opinions.

"It's a great testament to the democratic process," he said.

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