

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

201 WEST PARK AVENUE
TALLAHASSEE, FL 32301-7760

PHONE (850) 222-3803
FAX (850) 205-6849
WWW.FLACCB.ORG

MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



March 8, 2021

The Hon. Jayer Williamson
222 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Re: Catholic Opposition to HB 259

Dear Representative Williamson:

We represent the largest number of affected religious institutions in Florida, with 469 parishes, 57 missions, 205 K-12 schools, and we object strongly to the current proposal in SB 498. Consider the following concerns:

Contravenes well-reasoned policies in Catholic schools

The bill affects all religious institutions, but most especially private religious schools. Current law prohibits weapons from being brought on their campuses. We support the current law. Only sworn officers should be permitted to bring weapons on private school grounds. Such a policy has been uniformly embraced in Catholic schools across Florida, based on consultation with security experts and insurers.

Adds burdens that may invite violence

The bill would require a school that seeks to maintain a prohibition on carrying firearms on the property to post a notice to that effect. This constitutes an added burden and calls awareness to those who intend harm that the property is “softer,” diminishing the safety of these religious intuitions rather than the stated purpose of strengthening it.

If bill advances, “opt-in” should be required; not “opt-out”

It has been suggested that the legislation has been brought forward with the support of churches that desire to have armed volunteers cross school grounds to enter the church for security purposes. If any change is to be made to current law, those churches and schools that desire such collaboration should have the responsibility to negotiate those agreements and post their policies. The burden should fall to them; not to the majority of schools who oppose the proposed change. When legislation was proposed in previous years to this effect, essentially requiring those few schools with interest in a policy change to “opt-in,” we did not object.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael B. Sheedy". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Michael B. Sheedy

Cc: The Hon. Chris Latvala, Chairman, House Education & Employment Committee
Members of the House Education & Employment Committee
Most Rev. Gerald M. Barbarito, Bishop of Palm Beach & FCCB Moderator for Education
Michael T. Barrett, Esq., Associate for Education