



# Wisconsin Family Ties

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## **Armed Guards in School? Wrong Answer.**

Madison, WI – Wisconsin Family Ties has grave concerns about the version of AB65 that passed the Assembly with bipartisan support last night, after a series of astonishing legislative contortions.

The original version of AB65 would have brought universal background checks to Wisconsin, a common-sense measure that has overwhelming public support.

By the time the bill was brought to a vote, it bore no resemblance to the original. Instead, it would commit an unspecified amount of taxpayer funding for grants to hire armed guards in Wisconsin schools. The guards, and the schools that hire them, would be indemnified for “any actions taken in good faith” by the guards.

“Speed-legislating is rarely good legislating, and this piece of legislation is especially troubling,” said Joanne Juhnke, policy director for Wisconsin Family Ties. “We have repeatedly been told that the state does not have enough money to provide the level of staffing that students need, and that we must continue the ten-year freeze on special education funding. And yet, the Assembly just voted to commit some unknown level of funding for bringing more guns into schools, in the hands of armed guards who are indemnified for whatever use of those guns they deem suitable.”

Juhnke continued, “We commend the students who came to the Capitol yesterday to implore legislators to pass meaningful gun safety measures. They spoke movingly about their fears and years of active shooter drills. To respond to their pleas by putting more armed guards into schools is to magnify the existing trauma.”

Ever since Columbine, our nation’s primary response to the horror of school shootings has been to put armed officers into schools in hopes of pre-emptively shooting the next shooter. The results speak for themselves; school shootings have become more, not less, frequent. Additionally, there is a growing body of research showing the failure of police presence in schools to improve safety. School-based officers become unnecessarily involved in routine school discipline issues, and their presence has been correlated to an increase in charges for low-level offenses, which researchers and advocates believe facilitates the school-to-prison-pipeline. Overall student feelings of safety are not enhanced by school-based officers, especially among students of color.

Wisconsin Family Ties believes that it is long past time to take an altogether different approach. We need to educate our students in well-resourced schools, we need to ensure that all children and families are connected to their communities and needed supports, and we need to resist the temptation to make over our schools into mini-prisons. Therefore, we call upon the state Senate to reject this hastily-passed, ill-conceived bill.

*Wisconsin Family Ties, Wisconsin’s family voice for children’s mental health, is a parent-run nonprofit organization serving families that include children with social, emotional, behavioral or mental health challenges. Founded in 1987, its mission is to change lives by improving children’s mental health.*

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*Wisconsin’s family voice for children’s mental health*

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