

Student Testimony for HB 3338 - Alex Read

I have been a student at PSU for about two years. I have been and continue to be very concerned about the presence of armed security officers on our campus. However the root of the problem lies much deeper than just the presence of these officers; the entire process of armament and resistance to alternate ideas is highly problematic. As a student, I have repeatedly raised my voice in opposition to armament and participated in every process that there has been to address the issue. I have found that my concerns have been downplayed and disregarded. I, along with other students, have put together suggestions for alternatives to guns on campus, only for these suggestions to be completely ignored.

While I was not a PSU student at the time of armament, I have become very familiar with how the process unfolded. I know that ASPSU, the official student body of PSU, opposed armament from the beginning, passing a resolution to call for disarmament in April of 2016. The resolution highlighted the role that CPSO played in targeting marginalized communities (both students and non-students). It spoke to the fears that many students had to face just to step on campus: what is supposed to be an environment for learning became a place of danger for a large percentage of the population. The resolution proposed that the Board look to other forms of campus safety that did not inherently involve violence. This resolution was not even considered by the Board of Trustees.

When Jason Washington was killed on our campus this summer I thought that this had to change. The Board of Trustees must take the concerns of students, staff, and faculty seriously. Rather than immediately take steps to hear the concerns of the campus community—something they had consistently refused to do in the years prior—the Board decided to hire a third-party consultant, Margolis Healy, to look at campus safety standards at PSU. This outside consultancy firm came to campus with no knowledge of PSU, the community, or the armament process. They proceeded to repeat what had been done many times already, send out a surveys and hold forums for community members to be heard. Meanwhile the Board of Trustees continued to hesitate on making any kind of decision.

Now the report from this consultancy firm has been released to the public. Their methods are questionable and their conclusions suspect. Three things are worth noting from their report: first, their survey shows a majority in favor of disarmament. Second, they highlight the lack of training that CPSO has had, yet recommended continues armament. Finally, their conclusions on

the armament process confirm what many students, staff, and faculty already know: the entire armament process took place in contrast to the wishes of the campus community and represented a fundamental violation of the already weak trust between the Board and the community. The report says that the University Public Safety Oversight Committee (UPSOC) had no ability to function as a legitimate place for CPSO accountability to the community. Not only did CPSO rarely report to UPSOC, but UPSOC had no actual power to influence the activities of CPSO. It has now been almost nine months since Jason's death and I have no confidence that the Board has a plan on how to proceed with a larger discussion about campus safety. In the months that the killing took place, the Board should have been putting together a process in which students, staff, faculty, and community members could not only have their opinions heard but also have their interests represented. This has not occurred. I have first hand had conversations with Board members who are very unclear on how to move forward on this issue.

We, students of PSU, put together a rebuttal of the Margolis Healy report and a counter-proposal which asks for disarmament and put forward concrete campus safety alternatives at the most recent Board Meeting. Again, the Board has not responded or acknowledged this proposal. I have zero confidence that the Board is equipped to deal with the issue of campus armament, and will continue to fail to address the issue.

I am in support of HB 3338 because PSU should be disarmed immediately. No one else needs to die. Marginalized folk should not be consistently targeted and terrorized at a place of education. When a person of color was killed needlessly due to the recklessness of CPSO and the Board, that should be enough.

#DisarmPSU

Alexander Read