



Written testimony from
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before the
House Federal and State Affairs Committee
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The Honorable Steve Brunk and Members of the House Federal and State Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2353, which would allow the carrying of concealed handguns in state facilities.

Concealed carry on University campuses in Kansas will not increase security and public safety, but will likely produce a greater number of other risks and hazards, create an environment inconsistent with quality education, and complicate the jobs of the University Police. That is the unanimous position of the University Police Chiefs in Kansas.

Universities are highly unique communities with distinctive security practices and needs. Security and safety are important issues in postsecondary education and providing a safe environment in which to learn has been supported by many groups. These goals were advanced by the Clery Act, which is a federal mandate requiring all institutions of higher education to disclose information about crime on campus and in the surrounding communities. Universities that fail to comply with the act can be penalized with large fines and may be suspended from participating in the federal financial aid program. The Clery Act also requires Universities to provide timely warnings of crimes that represent a threat to the safety of students, staff, and faculty. Other public facilities, such as shopping centers, movie theaters, retail stores, and other work places are not held to this higher standard for public safety. Historically, the Kansas legislature has also recognized the need to protect high value assets and unique locations, such as Universities, by restricting the presence of firearms. We respectfully ask the legislature to help us protect our students, faculty, staff, and visitors by continuing to allow for a prohibition of firearms on campus.

It is our firm belief that allowing weapons on campus would significantly increase the risk of danger and tragedy, and not make anyone safer. University Police Officers in Kansas are state

certified law enforcement professionals highly trained in the proper use of firearms, and tactics needed for the quick resolution of violent encounters. The presence of firearms, legal or illegal, complicates the mission of our Police Officers. Since 2007, at least 370 people, including 11 law enforcement officers, have been killed in incidents not ruled self-defense involving private citizens legally allowed to carry concealed handguns according to the Violence Policy Center. It should not be assumed that the limited training persons licensed to carry a concealed weapon receive, will enable them to react in a safe, reasonable, and legal manner during a volatile situation.

“Concealing” a firearm, even one being carried legally, is not without risk of creating significant harm and panic to the University. We will continue to educate and encourage members of the University community to observe and report any indication that a crime is or may be occurring. Police must treat any report of an armed individual on campus with extreme caution and rapid response. How does the responding Officer know which person in the classroom of 300 students is legally in possession of a firearm or is armed with the intention of killing others? Each University has developed procedures for response to active shooters on campus. These procedures are practiced routinely by University Police and refined as necessary. Depending on the situation, evacuation, or closing of portions of the campus may be ordered, resulting in major disruption to the campus. However, the ability of campus authorities to “lock down” an entire campus and restrict the free movement of people is difficult, if not impossible. The presence of legal weapons on campus will create greater confusion during a crisis event. Police Officers’ response to an actual shooting event will be delayed by the necessity to challenge and validate each person brandishing a firearm.

We are particularly concerned with being able to distinguish the “good guys” from the “bad guys.” A person with a concealed carry license doesn’t have a badge or uniform. How does a responding Police Officer know which person with the gun is the threat? A significant number of plainclothes Police Officers across the country are shot each year by responding fellow Officers, due to misidentifying “threats.” If highly trained Police Officers have difficulty recognizing friend from foe, why would a 21-year-old college student with 8 hours of firearms training have better success? And conversely, if highly trained Police Officers have difficulty distinguishing fellow law enforcement officers in plain clothes from “bad guys,” how would it be any easier or different for them to distinguish students authorized concealed carry on campus from “bad guys”? Shootings are tremendously chaotic events, as evident in the Arizona mass shooting one year ago that claimed six lives and wounded 13 others, including U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords. A citizen legally carrying a firearm rushed to the scene of the Tucson shooting with his hand pressed around the handgun in his pocket. On arrival, two unarmed men and a woman had already tackled the shooter, and a man was holding the suspect’s handgun. During the mass confusion, the legally armed citizen went after the bystander holding the gun. Fortunately, he didn’t shoot. Concealed weapon carry introduces yet another level of complexity and danger for Police Officers and others when managing a crisis situation on campus.

Despite the best planning and precautions, accidents with guns can and will occur. The discharge of a firearm is not always an intentional act. Last January, at a Los Angeles High School, a handgun in a student’s backpack accidentally went off after being dropped. Two students were seriously wounded by the single bullet. Research indicates that guns in the home increase the risk

of firearm related death or injury to the household member rather than protecting them. Owners of firearms bear a great deal of responsibility. We fear the potential for accidental discharge or misuse of firearms at on-campus or off-campus parties where large numbers of students or at student gatherings where alcohol is being consumed, as well as the prospect for guns to be used as a means to settle disputes between or among students. Having the capability to take another person's life is an enormously powerful thing. We know that a great deal of personal maturity occurs during college life. Based on our experience policing University communities in Kansas, we have witnessed catastrophic examples of poor judgment and reckless behavior by college students. We are absolutely convinced that the risks created by firearms on campus exceed any actual benefit for self protection.

There are other unique public safety concerns created by guns on campus. Statistically, theft is the number-one crime on college campus. These are crimes of opportunity made possible by inattention or carelessness given to the security of personal property. Laptop computers, cell phones, backpacks, and purses are easy targets taken from campus facilities, classrooms, and dormitories. Theft of a weapon is a significant risk, in terms of both the likelihood of theft as well as from the danger associated with weapons falling into the wrong hands. Guns are extremely appealing to thieves. University Police cannot in all cases prevent unauthorized persons from coming into possession of a gun brought to campus by a legitimate firearm owner.

As Public Safety Officials, we continue to search for ways to keep our Universities safe. A myriad of layered security measures are taken to keep campus communities in Kansas secure. The risk of violent crimes is greatly reduced when compared to crimes that occur off-campus. As a group, persons on campus are less likely to be victims of violent crime. Thus, members of this population carrying concealed weapons will not significantly decrease or deter violent crimes. Legislative action permitting further and unlimited concealed carry of weapons on University campuses will not make our campuses safer.

For the reasons described, it is our professional and experienced conviction that firearms do not enhance University security, but will contradict many of the best practices already in place and create an environment on campus ripe for future tragedy. We strongly urge that any proposed legislation that would increase, rather than decrease, the number of firearms on our campuses be rejected.

I would be happy to take questions from the committee.