Despite the fact that virtually every higher education and law enforcement stakeholder group opposes the idea of expanding the presence of handguns on public college campuses, state legislatures throughout the country continue to introduce legislation to do exactly that. An aggressive gun lobby has facilitated the introduction of guns on campus legislation in no less than 40 states in recent years, and in at least 15 states so far just this year. With every campus and school shooting—of which there have been more than 110 since the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut—the National Rifle Association and its allies intensify efforts to eviscerate public safety laws involving firearms.

In 2004, Utah became the first state to require its public universities to allow concealed weapons on campus. Since 2011, six states have followed suit by forcing colleges to allow concealed permit holders to possess guns in specified areas on campus, although Utah and Colorado are the only two states that allow guns everywhere on campus. Further, court cases in four states have overturned long-standing policies prohibiting firearms on campus. Still, the remaining 43 states have in place policies that prohibit guns on campus or allow colleges to decide for themselves whether to allow guns on campus.

Gun rights advocates are using every means to advance their agenda, such as co-opting the current policy debate regarding campus sexual assault prevention, by suggesting that arming women on campus with guns will deter rape. Congress’ refusal to meaningfully address gun violence is certain to confine the debate to the state policy arena for the foreseeable future.

Fortunately, gun safety organizations, in tandem with the K-12 and higher education communities, have become increasingly energized and organized in countering the push for greater access to firearms and their presence in more corners of everyday society. Groups such as the Campaign to Keep Guns off Campus (www.keepgunsoffcampus.org) and Everytown for Gun Safety (www.everytown.org) have mobilized a broad array of constituency groups and are marshalling resources to mitigate unfettered access to guns and the unrestrained presence of concealed firearms in public settings.

The Campaign to Keep Guns off Campus offers several arguments for maintaining a ban on firearms on campus. Among the reasons are the following:

- **Campuses are safe**: The homicide rate is 44 times greater in U.S. society at large than on college campuses. Ninety-three percent of violent crimes that victimize students occur off campus.

- **Workplace safety**: Studies have shown that, as is the case in households where guns are present, workplaces that allow guns have homicide rates multiple times higher than work settings that do not permit concealed weapons on the premises.
Increased risk of suicide: Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young adults. The most common method of attempted suicide is drug overdose, which, fortunately, is only fatal about 3 percent of the time. In contrast, suicide attempts with firearms are fatal more than 90 percent of the time. Increased presence of guns on campus would increase the likelihood that the more than 24,000 suicide attempts by college students annually would be fatal.

Campus law enforcement opposition: The International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) asserts that ‘concealed carry’ initiatives do not make campuses safer and that there is no credible evidence to suggest that the presence of students carrying guns would reduce violence on college campuses.

Concealed carry permit holders are not always “law-abiding” citizens: A growing body of evidence illustrates that private citizens who legally carry handguns pose a new public safety threat; precisely the opposite outcome argued by conceal carry proponents. In the past eight years, concealed handgun permit holders have killed at least 17 law enforcement officers and 705 private citizens.

Cost associated with complying with state mandates forcing colleges to allow guns on campus: Requiring colleges to allow guns on campus comes with a hefty compliance price tag. Statewide costs borne by public colleges can add up to millions of dollars for additional campus security measures, training for faculty and staff, gun safes and signage.

AASCU’s official statement on the issue, articulated in its Public Policy Agenda, is to maintain authority for establishing campus security and weapons policy with college officials and governing boards. It further calls for opposing state legislation that seeks to strip institutional and/or system authority to regulate concealed weapons on campus. AASCU has joined 370 colleges in 42 states in signing on to the Campaign to Keep Guns off Campus resolution “opposing legislation that would preempt an educational institution’s right to prohibit or adopt policies to regulate possession of firearms on campus.”

The case against forcing colleges to allow guns on campus is overwhelming. Yet, college leaders, governing board members, and law enforcement officials must remain steadfast in ensuring that campuses remain gun free. AASCU’s Division of Government Relations and Policy Analysis stands ready to serve as a resource to aid in our collective quest to ensure that America’s public college and university campuses remain among the safest sanctuaries in society.

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