

The Important Work of Keeping Guns Off Campus

By Andy Pelosi and John Johnson

Colleges and universities are charged with providing a safe environment for students, faculty, staff and visitors. Accordingly, nearly all colleges and universities—public and private—have adopted policies that prohibit or severely restrict firearm possession on their campuses.

These gun-free policies have helped make postsecondary education institutions some of the safest places in the country. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of homicides on U.S. college campuses is typically less than 25 deaths per year. Additionally, the department has placed the overall homicide rate on college campuses at .07 per 100,000 persons.¹ In comparison, the homicide rate in the United States for persons aged 17 to 29 is 14.1 per 100,000 persons, a rate 200 times that in the college population.²

In recent years, these long-standing policies of prohibiting loaded, concealed guns on campus have been under attack from the gun lobby. Since 2004, legislation has been introduced in at least 37 states that would take away the right of colleges and universities

The **CAMPAIGN TO KEEP GUNS OFF CAMPUS** was formed in 2008 to urge colleges and universities to unite in opposition to the gun lobby's agenda to push guns onto college campuses. To date, AASCU and more than 365 individual colleges and universities in 41 states have joined the campaign by signing a resolution opposing legislation that would take away the right of an educational institution to regulate possession of firearms on its own campus. For a full list of campuses, visit keepgunsoffcampus.org.

to regulate firearms on their campuses. While these so-called “guns-on-campus” bills have failed in most states, they have passed in some form in eight states: Utah (2004), Wisconsin (2011), Mississippi (2011), Florida (2012), Arkansas (2013), Kansas (2013), North Carolina (2013) and Idaho (2014).

The gun lobby argues that if private citizens carried concealed weapons, we would all be safer. But this is simply not the case. Study after study has shown that where there are more guns, there are more gun deaths and injuries. Armed students would be unlikely to prevent a mass shooting. Furthermore, the unintended consequences that would result if guns were

to become readily available to students—a shooting during an argument or dispute, attempted suicide, unintentional shooting—are real and would make college campuses more dangerous every hour of every day.

Virtually every stakeholder group—college leaders, public safety officials, faculty, students and parents—are ardently against the idea of state mandates to allow guns on campus. For example, in two different surveys of faculty and students at 15 midwestern colleges last year, findings demonstrated that:

- 97 percent of faculty members felt safe on campus, and 94 percent opposed on-campus concealed-carry. Further, 82 percent said they would feel less safe if faculty, students and visitors were allowed to carry guns.³
- The majority (78 percent) of students were not supportive of concealed handguns on campuses, and 78 percent claimed that they would not obtain a permit to carry a handgun on campus, if it were legal. Those who perceived more disadvantages to carrying handguns on campus were females who did not own firearms, did not have a firearm in the home growing up, and were not concerned with becoming a victim of crime.⁴

America's colleges and universities cannot afford to sit on the sidelines on this issue, as strong opposition from the educational community is the best way to defeat the gun lobby's dangerous agenda. We urge the higher education community—administrators, faculty, parents and students—to continue to take a stand and remain active in their state legislatures. Guns on campus bills can be defeated, but doing so requires our vigilance. While it takes courage to stand up to the gun lobby, working to defeat these bills will help keep our students safe. **P**

¹U.S. Department of Education. “Campus crime statistics homicide rates: The Campus Safety and Security Data Analysis Cutting Tool.” Retrieved from <http://ope.ed.gov/security/>.

²U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2008). “Uniform crime report: homicide rates in the United States.” Retrieved from http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2009/january/ucr_stats011209/.

³Decker, T. (2013, Jan 20). Professors against guns on campus. *The Columbus Dispatch*. Retrieved from <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2013/01/20/professors-against-guns-on-campus.html>.

⁴Thompson, A., Price, J.H., et al. (2013). Student perceptions and practices regarding carrying concealed handguns on university campuses. *Journal of American College Health*. 61(5), 243-53.

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Higher Expectations is a new section of *Public Purpose* that asks various higher education constituents the simple question: What do you and your industry expect, need or want from the nation's public colleges and universities?