



**CEASEFIRE** oregon

February 8, 2012

Judiciary Committee  
Oregon Senate

Re: Ceasefire Oregon Supports SB 1550

Dear Chair Prozanski and Committee Members,

Ceasefire Oregon strongly supports a ban on firearms in all Oregon public schools at all levels, kindergarten through university. In elementary schools, high schools, and colleges, personal weapons do not provide protection against the exceedingly rare, but horrific, school shootings that have become needlessly common in recent years. Furthermore, readily available guns on college campuses can turn suicide attempts into devastating losses for families and entire communities.

The International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators has found that there “is no credible evidence to suggest that the presence of students carrying concealed weapons would reduce violence on our college campuses.” The organization has concluded that allowing people to carry concealed weapons on college campuses would likely increase homicides, suicides, and reckless shooting incidents on campus.<sup>1</sup>

Campus law enforcement officers are well-positioned to judge the risks and advantages of armed students in the event of a campus shooting. Armed visitors, teachers, and students are likely to increase, rather than diminish, the death toll in the event of a shooting on a school campus. A civilian shooter, whether student or adult, is likely to have minimal training. Reacting under the extreme stress of a school shooting, the civilian shooter poses a grave threat to students and staff, who can be caught in the crossfire.

Law enforcement officers responding to such emergencies would also face enormous difficulties. If police arrived on the scene of a campus shooting and found multiple students with handguns drawn, how would they know who their target is? This scenario was contemplated by the Virginia Tech Review Panel, which commented: “If numerous people had been rushing around with handguns outside Norris Hall on the morning of April 16, [2007,] the possibility of accidental or mistaken shootings would have increased significantly. The campus police said that the probability would have been high that anyone emerging from a classroom at Norris Hall holding a gun would have been shot.”<sup>2</sup>

In a survey of over 400 campus police chiefs, 86% disagreed or strongly disagreed that “allowing students to carry concealed weapons on campus would prevent some or all campus killings.”<sup>3</sup> Law enforcement responding to a shooting on campus may not know which person is the aggressor. Also, with everyone armed, security will be less able to issue “lock-down” advisories or disarm a campus threat before the shooting starts.

Guns on college campuses, including guns carried under state-issued concealed handgun licenses (CHLs), pose a significant risk to college students under the best of circumstances. Allowing guns on a college campus is likely to lead to more gun thefts, which are a key source of guns used in crime.<sup>4</sup> And, in the close-knit and sometimes tempestuous lives of college students, the licensed handgun in a friend’s backpack, a professor’s bag, or a roommate’s drawer may end a life more easily than one purchased at local gun show.

Evidence indicates that gun-owning college students engage in more risky behavior than others. Two studies done by Harvard researchers have shown that college student gun owners (4.3 % of the students) are less law-abiding than the average student. Students with guns at school were more likely than the average student to engage in risky behavior (including binge drinking), use cocaine or crack, be arrested for a DUI, vandalize property, and get in trouble with police. Rather than offering a measure of protection, gun ownership among students is associated with behaviors that are likely to put the owners and others at risk for injury.<sup>5</sup>

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As horrific as school shootings are, perhaps the most significant risk to college students from guns is suicide. Students are at elevated risks for suicide, with 1,100 successful suicides and an additional 24,000 attempts every year.<sup>6</sup>

Less than one year ago, the University of Oregon's Daily Emerald reported that 55% of college students consider committing suicide.<sup>7</sup> The same issue also profiled the gun suicide of Kerry Adam Lewiecki, just weeks after his graduation from the University of Oregon Law School in June 2009. Kerry Lewiecki's father, a physician and university teacher, and Kerry's fiancé, a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard Medical School, wrote a piece for the Journal of the American Medical Association titled "Time to Reconsider," persuasively chronicling the evidence that restricting access to highly lethal means significantly reduces the risk of impulsive suicide.<sup>8</sup>

Nine out of ten people who attempt suicide (by any means) and survive will not go on to die by suicide later.<sup>9</sup> But if a gun is used in a suicide attempt, more than 90% of attempts are fatal, compared to a 3% fatality rate for suicide attempts by drug overdose.<sup>10</sup> Keeping guns off campus gives students in crisis time to reconsider.

A universal prohibition on guns in public schools should not contain any exemption for people with concealed handgun licenses (CHLs). In an elementary or secondary school setting, teachers and staff cannot reliably keep a gun accessible for self-defense without the possibility that a child will also gain access to the weapon. And CHLs should not become the route to college-campus gun possession either. CHLs do not make gun owners mature or immunize them against risky or unlawful behavior.

In fact, concealed carry licensees are not the "best of the best" that many have claimed. CHL holders have committed homicides, violent felonies, and other horrific crimes.<sup>11</sup> Several mass shooters, including the Virginia Tech killer, would have been issued concealed carry licenses had they sought them.

Ceasefire Oregon urges you to prohibit firearms in all Oregon public schools and universities. Please support SB 1550.

Respectfully submitted,



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Elise Gautier  
President, Ceasefire Oregon

Ceasefire Oregon wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence in compiling the research presented in this testimony.

1. IACLEA Position Statement: Concealed Carrying of Firearms Proposals on College Campuses, August 12, 2008, at <http://keepgunsoff-campus.org/documents/IACLEA%20Statement.pdf>.
2. *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech, April 16, 2007: Report of the Review Panel*, at <http://www.ipfw.edu/crisis/resources/vt-report-governor.pdf>, page 75.
3. Thompson, Amy, James H. Price, Adam Mrdjenovich, and Jagdish Khubchandani, "Reducing Firearm-Related Violence on College Campuses—Police Chiefs' Perceptions and Practices," *Journal of American College Health* 58(3) 2009:247–254.
4. Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, *No Gun Left Behind: The Gun Lobby's Campaign to Push Guns Into Colleges and Schools* 8 (2007), at <http://www.bradycampaign.org/xshare/pdf/reports/no-gun-left-behind.pdf>.
5. Miller, Matthew, David Hemenway, and Henry Wechsler, "Guns and Gun Threats at College," *Journal of American College Health* 51(57) (September 2002):62–64; Miller, et al., "Guns at College," *Journal of American College Health* 48(7) (1999).
6. Cintron, Miriam, "College Campuses Grapple with Escalating Suicide Rates," *Nearwestgazette.com* (on file with the Brady Center).
7. "Learning to Cope," *Oregon Daily Emerald*, April 22, 2011.
8. Lewiecki, E. Michael and Sara A. Miller, "Time to Reconsider," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 305 (11) (March 16, 2011).
9. Owens, D, J. Horrocks, and A. House, "Fatal and non-fatal repetition of self-harm: systematic review," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 2002; 181:193–199, at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/index.html#Owens>.
10. Miller, Matthew, et al., "Household Firearm Ownership and Rates of Suicide Across the 50 United States," *Journal of Trauma* (April 2007):1029.
11. *Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, No Gun Left Behind: The Gun Lobby's Campaign to Push Guns Into Colleges and Schools* 22, 23 (2007), at <http://www.bradycampaign.org/xshare/pdf/reports/no-gun-left-behind.pdf>.