



To: USUAA General Assembly
Relevant, Interested Parties

From: Jonathon Taylor - President, USUAA Student Government

DS
JT

Date: February 24, 2016

SIGNING STATEMENT - RESOLUTION #16-18

At a time when the state—and the university—faces a fiscal crisis of unique proportions, it is perplexing that the Alaska Senate Majority sees it necessary to consider SB174, which would eliminate the ability of the UA Board of Regents to regulate the possession of concealed knives and firearms on university campuses. Legislative action would be one thing if it were put forth after a demonstrable failure by University of Alaska administrators to balance the right to bear arms and the concern for campus safety. But conflicts between students, staff, or faculty and established UA policy regulating the possession of weapons are exceedingly rare. On the contrary, the University has struck a balance that allows law-abiding citizens to protect themselves whilst ensuring all students can benefit from a safe learning environment.

The legislation as it currently stands has deep, practical problems. Time in the legislature spent on a divisive social issue is time not spent on crafting a long-term solution that addresses Alaska's budgetary future, arguably a situation that requires attention, care, and consistent dialogue so that all constituent voices are heard. Upon passage, staff hours at the Statewide and Major Academic Unit (MAU) level will be required to draft, review, and finalize policy to meet the new requirements. Those are hours that could be spent on things like Title IX Compliance, fiscal management, and student services that are lost. Student resident advisors (RAs) and other housing personnel will now need training on how to de-escalate student conflicts that could involve firearms—presuming that 19- and 20-year-old students will actually still want to be RAs should the legislation pass.

We also fail to see how removing the Board's ability to regulate weapons on UA campuses contributes positively to the educational environment. Given that this legislation strips the Board's ability to make policy, but not its responsibility to manage and regulate the University System, we would hope that at least some consideration would be given to the purpose of higher education. Thus far, no reasoning has been given as to how this policy creates a safer, more positive learning environment on campus. On the contrary, we believe it does the opposite.

Ultimately, consideration of SB174 comes down to a weighing of practical impacts. Supporters say the legislation re-affirms the Constitutionally-enshrined right to bear arms. We believe this claim is tenuous at best: rights are never absolute, and current University policy strikes a balance between preserving that right and protecting the campus environment. Conversely, guaranteed practical harms would occur with the passage of this legislation - the inability of the Board to regulate the University, the potential for conflict to escalate violently more easily, the perception of decreased safety by UA stakeholders, potential loss of administrators and others who would rather leave the University than attempt to endure under such a model, and the loss of staff hours towards vital university business in favor of crafting regulation to name just a few. We fail to see how a tenuous claim of principled consistency outweighs the practical harms nearly guaranteed to occur. Current policy is more than sufficient. As representatives of over 18,000 UA students, we firmly oppose SB174.

JT



Union of Students of the University of Alaska Anchorage

Resolution #16-18

Opposing SB-174

SPONSORED BY: Genevieve Fayette, *Senator*

WRITTEN BY: Genevieve Fayette, *Senator*; Student & Academic Affairs, *Committee*

ENDORSED BY: Jonathon Taylor, *President*; Matthieu Ostrander, *Vice President*; Student & Academic Affairs, *Committee*

DATE: February 19, 2016

WHEREAS: Gun violence has become a significant issue on college campuses, particularly in recent years, with over 23 shootings at colleges across the US in 2014 alone¹; and,

WHEREAS: Senate Bill 174 "An Act Relating to the Regulation of Firearms and Knives by the University of Alaska" seeks to overrule the Board of Regents policy relating to weapons on campus, making it permissible to carry concealed weapons on university grounds; and,

WHEREAS: The presence of weapons on campus would drastically reduce the ability of the university to ensure the safety of its students, staff, faculty, and visitors, as university staff and security personnel would have to consider every situation as one that could potentially escalate into violence; and,

WHEREAS: The on-campus housing environment is particularly unsuited to the presence of firearms, as the primary individuals on-duty that would be expected to respond to potential incidents involving firearms are residence hall student staff that currently have no firearms training; and,

WHEREAS: The frequent presence and consumption of alcohol, as well as the large population of legal minors in residence halls, makes the on-campus environment further unsuited to the introduction of firearms; and,

WHEREAS: Suicide is the second leading cause of death among American college students, and suicide attempts made with firearms are disproportionately lethal as compared to other means; and,

¹ Sanburn, Josh. "These Are All The College Campus Shootings In 2015". *TIME.com*. N.p., 2015. Web. 17 Feb. 2016.

- WHEREAS: The known presence of weapons on campus would compromise the educational environment of the University, which relies upon a shared understanding of safety for and among all students; and,
- WHEREAS: The University of Alaska is a veteran-friendly organization with a large proportion of current and former service members among its student body; and,
- WHEREAS: The environment created by the known presence of weapons on campus could prove especially disconcerting to individuals with a history of combat or other military service; and,
- WHEREAS: Current Board of Regents policy is in alignment with Alaska state law, as it restricts the use and possession of weapons only within university boundaries, allows them to be kept safely in locked containers in vehicles, does not extend to the general public, and allows for special petition to the chancellor; and,
- WHEREAS: This policy from the Board of Regents successfully balances the rights of individuals to possess firearms, the expectation of safety that students enjoy on campus, and the obligation of the University to provide such safety, and,
- WHEREAS: The University Police Department, in addition to nearby APD and Alaska State Trooper Headquarters, provide extensive protective services, including response times under three minutes and escort services upon request, mitigating the need for students to arm themselves on campus;

THEREFORE BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED

The Union of Students of the University of Alaska Anchorage stands firmly in opposition of SB 174 as it is currently written; and,

THEREFORE BE IT HEREBY FURTHER RESOLVED

The Union of Students of the University of Alaska Anchorage implores that the Alaska State Senate give credence to the voices of students who do not wish their educational institution to be open to firearms; and,

THEREFORE BE IT HEREBY FURTHER RESOLVED

That a copy of this legislation be forwarded to Alaska Senate President Kevin Meyer, Alaska State Senator Mike Dunleavy, Alaska State Senator Charlie Huggins, Alaska State Senator Cathy Giessel, Alaska State Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Senator Berta Gardner, the University of Alaska Board of Regents, the University of Alaska Coalition of Student Leaders, University of Alaska Anchorage Chancellor Tom Case; Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Dr. Bruce Schultz; Dean of Students and Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Development Dr. Dewain L. Lee; Director of Student Life and Leadership Annie Route; and Assistant Director of Student Leadership Paula Fish.

The Assembly has passed the attached legislation by a 13-0-1 vote. This legislation required a majority vote of the Assembly, and has been through all of the Assembly's legislative processes. This requires the President's signature of approval or disapproval seven days from its receipt.

DocuSigned by:

Samuel Doepken

February 24, 2016 1:03

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Speaker of the Assembly Samuel Doepken

Date

Time

☒ Approved

☐ Vetoed

DocuSigned by:

Jonathon Taylor

February 24, 2016 1:08PM

BC25D163E7104DC
President Jonathon Taylor

Date

Time

For Office Use Only

Date of Meeting and Approval: _____ Date of Receipt: _____ Scan ☐ Web ☐ Binder ☐