

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Abel Bult-Ito <abultito@alaska.edu>

Date: Wed, Mar 12, 2014 at 6:57 PM

Subject: SB 176 and HB 335

To: Senator John Coghill <acleg.gov>

Cc: Abel Bult-Ito <abultito@alaska.edu>

Dear Senator Coghill,

I wanted to let you know that the United Academics AAUP/AFT Local 4996 Representative Assembly is in strong opposition to SB 176 and HB 335. United Academics represents 965 faculty members across the University of Alaska. We hope that you will vote against this bill.

Several of the reasons for our opposition to this Senate and House bill have already appeared in the news media and at the bill's hearing and they include:

The presence of deadly weapons in the classroom environment would leave many students and faculty feeling unsafe and would severely stifle their academic expression. In our classrooms, we challenge students to go beyond what they know and to examine preconceived notions to develop a well-rounded and educated citizen. This environment may be uncomfortable at times and might create a healthy level of criticism and doubt. This is normal in an academic environment and is part of the learning process. The lack of a safe classroom environment may inspire many students to transfer to another university, where they will feel less threatened. Everyone in the classroom must feel safe.

Passage of SB 176 and HB 335 will negatively influence parent's decisions to send their children to study at the University of Alaska. Parents recognize the risks already inherent in sending their children into a new environment. The traditional student may be away from home for the first time and ready to experiment with newfound freedoms. Unfortunately, this often includes experimentation with alcohol, drugs and other risky behaviors motivated by youthful curiosity and peer pressure. Adding guns to that mix would be deadly. Furthermore, being away from family and experiencing the cold and dark of long Alaska winters can create problems that students and staff cannot always understand or anticipate until it is too late. Easy access to firearms can quickly turn a problem into a tragedy. Student safety is paramount.

The ability to carry concealed guns into the classroom will result in the loss of excellent faculty and staff. For many faculty, the thought of interacting with a classroom of students or conducting one-on-one interviews with students knowing that some of them may be carrying a deadly weapon is disquieting at best. Staff persons whose positions oftentimes involve dispute resolution are also unnerved at the thought of a deadly weapon becoming part of the interaction. Most professionals would find the threat unbearable and choose to find other employment.

Passage of SB 176 and HB 335 will make it harder to recruit and retain the best faculty to the University of Alaska. The threatening environment that would result from the passage of SB 176 and HB 335 would be unappealing to candidates of UA faculty positions. The educational quality of UA programs would suffer from the decline in high quality faculty.

Passage of SB 176 and HB 335 would eliminate the authority of UA Board of Regents to regulate campus life in the interest of safety for all who study and work at the university. The presence of guns on UA campuses and ensuing unsafe environment will negatively affect the morale of faculty, staff, and students. If SB 176 and HB 335 pass we anticipate a loss of valuable faculty

and staff, a decline in student enrollment and even more difficulty in filling available UA faculty and staff positions.

The United States has about 4,500 2-year and 4-year degree-granting institutions in the United States (1) and enrolled 19.9 million students in October 2012; 14.6 million of those were full-time (2). In 2013, according to the Huffington Post's review of news reports on shootings occurring on or near campuses, there were at least 27 shootings resulting in 18 deaths. The vast majority of these shootings appeared to have targeted victims. Only two incidents reportedly involved an "active shooter" scenario (3). The takeaway from this is that university/college campuses are remarkably safe environments. Any argument that people need guns to protect themselves from potential shooters is a very weak argument at best. The chance for a student to be shot on campus is less than one in one million.

Anyone can keep a gun in their car at the university right now; they just cannot bring it into a university building. Consequently, their right to bear arms is not violated. We all know of situations in which we are not allowed to carry arms in the best interest of public safety, while this does not violate the Second Amendment. United Academics opposes SB 176 and HB 335 because it is not in the best interest of public safety or public education.

Best regards, Abel

Notes:

1. 2009-2010 figures, National Center for Education Statistics,
<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>

2. U.S. Census, Current Population Survey, School Enrollment in the United States: October 2012, Table 5, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/2012/tables.html>

3. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/13/shootings-college-campuses-2013_n_4577404.html

Abel Bult-Ito, Ph.D.

President, United Academics AAUP/AFT Local 4996
Phone: 907-474-2461
Email: abultito@alaska.edu

Professor of Neurobiology
Department of Biology and Wildlife
University of Alaska Fairbanks
P.O. Box 756100
Fairbanks, AK 99775-6100, USA
Phone: 1-907-474-7158
Fax: 1-907-474-6185
Email: abultito@alaska.edu