



UNIVERSITY
of ALASKA

Many Traditions One Alaska

Senator John Coghill
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
State Capitol Room 119
Juneau AK, 99801

March 18, 2014

Dear Senator Coghill,

The Student Services Council (SSC) of the University of Alaska, comprised of the Officers with the responsibility of overseeing student life operations on the University campuses including residence halls, student activities and health and wellness *oppose* SB 176/HB 335.

Foremost in our reasoning: the challenges inherent to college life (including the stress and social obstacles found in high density communal living) which when combined with the presence of alcohol and drugs, and overlain with weapons, could have potentially lethal consequences for our campus communities. Given such stresses, we contend that introducing guns into this mix may increase the safety risks to students, faculty and staff.


This isn't about being pro or anti guns. UA allows weapons on campus in a reasonable way, such as in secure storage, at special events and in locked cars. The CS for SB 176 creates a situation where UA is responsible for conduct in shared student housing but is unable to do what makes sense.


The availability of weapons on campus could also have an adverse impact on the student suicide rate. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for American college students¹, and thousands more attempt suicide but do not succeed. Add to this that the State of Alaska's suicide rate is nearly twice the national average and the leading cause of death in Alaska for people ages 15 to 24² and our collective concern deepens.


Open access to firearms on campus and especially in residence halls would likely worsen this serious problem, as suicide attempts involving firearms are almost always fatal. Weapons in residence halls would also create the reality of training 18, 19, or 20-year-old student employees - Resident Assistants ("RA's") to deal with students impaired (or not) who may be in possession of a weapon. While hard to predict, it is reasonable that many students will choose to no longer work in residence halls and either work off campus or perhaps take more in student loans to pay for their educations. This chilling effect on the ability to recruit, retain, and properly train employees extends to both students and staff.


The University of Alaska campuses are places of education and training that have been specifically set aside for debate; the free exchange of ideas, exploration and discovery among young people making the transition to adulthood. Weapons on campus don't enhance that learning and growth experience; they detract from it.

Sincerely,


Saichi Oba
UA
Associate VP
Student & Enrollment


Dr. Bruce Schultz
UAA
Vice Chancellor
Student Affairs


Dr. Michael Straga
UAP
Vice Chancellor
University & Student
Advancement


Joe Nelson
UAS
Vice Chancellor
Enrollment Mgmt. &
Student Affairs

¹ Suicide Prevention Resource Center, <http://www.sprc.org/collegesanduniversities/campus-data/prevalence>

² <http://www.adn.com/2013/11/23/3193331/study-suggests-connection-between.html>