

February 12, 2016

**University of Alaska Concerns About SB 174
Concealed Carry on Campus**

SB 174 takes away most of the Board of Regents' authority to regulate the carrying of concealed handguns and knives at the university, even by persons who don't have a concealed carry permit.

As drafted, the legislation would preclude the Board of Regents and University administration from effectively managing student and employee conflicts and campus safety issues where concealed weapons are involved. The Board of Regents and UA Administration oppose the bill in its current form. The following details the University's concerns about the proposed legislation and explains changes requested by the University.

Differences Between the University and State or Municipal Governments. Unlike state or municipal laws, the University's firearms regulations do not extend into the community at large. University policy and regulation only apply to conduct in University buildings and on UA's developed property.¹ These rules do not establish criminal penalties, and primarily affect students and University employees.

In addition, these rules are required to permit the University to manage areas, situations and people *for which the University is responsible*. This distinction is critical because unlike the state or a municipality, the University must proactively manage and is responsible for how thousands of students and employees interact as they live, eat, work and play on its premises.

Critical Changes Requested – UA does not support this bill because it eliminates UA's ability to effectively manage student and employee conflicts and safety issues where concealed weapons are involved. However, amendment to permit regulation in the highly sensitive situations discussed below would address a number of concerns.

¹ The University believes its current policy and regulations are constitutional and allow it to effectively deal with safety issues as they arise. Firearms are permitted: at approved and supervised activities, including rifle ranges, gun shows, etc.; in cars located on streets or in parking lots; by faculty or staff in residences and by dormitory students in approved storage, and while transporting firearms directly to residences or dormitory storage locations; and on undeveloped and uninhabited university land. As detailed in a March 31, 2014 memo to Senate Finance, the constitutional right to bear arms is not implicated when restrictions apply only to sensitive places such as schools and government buildings. That memo is attached as Appendix A.

The University must have rules to effectively manage the following critical situations. In addition, these situations are analogous to situations in which concealed carry is criminalized under current state law. However, because of technical distinctions, they fall short of coverage by criminal law, and could not be regulated by the University under the current bill. UA requests amendment to permit regulation in the following circumstances to address these critical safety issues:

1) When the behavior of students or employees demonstrate they pose a risk of harm to themselves or others - The Report to the NRA by the National School Shield Task Force recommends that schools react promptly to behavior that indicates a risk. However, under the bill as structured, a student or employee who exhibits behavior indicating they pose a risk of harm to themselves or others, or who exhibits warning signs including depression, suicidal gestures, or overt hostility or aggression (everyday occurrences on residential college campuses) could not be deprived of his/her concealed weapons.² The Americans with Disabilities Act and comparable state law prohibits the university from simply removing mentally ill individuals from campus. Allowing regulation that provides a reviewable process to prohibit or restrict troubled individuals from possessing weapons on campus would provide an essential tool to keep campuses safe while complying with state and federal anti-discrimination law. This is particularly true given the high rate of suicide in Alaska, and the increased fatality rates associated with suicide attempts using firearms.

2) In student dormitories or other shared living quarters – Unlike private homes, student housing and dorms provide a high density, communal living environment for the convenience of students. Unlike private landlords, UA has significantly more responsibility for student well-being. UA serves as the “adult,” through residence advisors and other staff, monitoring student well-being, resolving disputes, and requiring compliance with rules. More than half of resident students are under 21 years old, may not legally carry concealed weapons, and do not necessarily get to choose their roommates. The bill would result in concealed weapons being present in dorms where they would be accessible to ineligible roommates and transient guests, and where alcohol is readily available for consumption. Allowing regulation that would prohibit possession of concealed weapons in shared student residences would be

² This is the case even if the person is involuntarily hospitalized for psychological evaluation, if the evaluation ends without a formal finding of mental illness or formal commitment for treatment. Unless a person is formally adjudicated mentally ill he/she remains eligible to possess weapons under state and federal law. While this may be appropriate in the broader community, it is not required for “sensitive places” like schools, universities and government buildings in which there is no constitutional right to carry weapons.

consistent with existing age limits on concealed carry, alcohol restrictions on possession of firearms, as well as with requirements for “adult resident” consent to concealed carry in a residence.

3) In university programs for K-12 students and in facilities where programming for K-12 students is provided – The University runs numerous dedicated programs for K-12 students on university premises.³ These include programs like Mat-Su Middle College and ANSEP at UAA, Upward Bound and RAHI at UAF, and summer college experience programming at UAS. Allowing regulation in this area would avoid a situation where the University cannot manage these programs consistent with existing state law that generally criminalizes adult possession of deadly and defensive weapons on K-12 grounds, in buildings, and at K-12 events.

4) In university facilities housing health and counseling services or other services related to sexual harassment or violence – University health and counseling centers and Title IX compliance offices routinely investigate allegations of sexual assault, sexual harassment and domestic violence as well as provide assistance to alleged victims and alleged perpetrators. Allowing regulation in these areas would avoid situations where the University must allow disgruntled and seriously stressed parties to bring concealed weapons to investigative or other meetings, and would parallel existing state law making possession of a firearm on the grounds of a domestic violence shelter a crime.

5) During adjudication of staff or student disputes or disciplinary issues – The University routinely adjudicates staff and student disputes, disciplinary and academic issues. On the student side these cases frequently involve assaultive behavior. Allowing regulation would avoid a situation where the University would be required to allow combative and highly stressed students or employees to carry a concealed weapon to adjudications, and would be consistent with current state law that makes possession of a firearm in a court facility a crime.

All the above situations are analogous to situations that have been criminalized under state law. Absent the ability to regulate in these high-risk areas, UA will be placed in a situation where it

³ Literally thousands of K-12 students are on our campuses during the course of a year, taking classes, participating in outreach or other educational programming.

cannot act when harm is foreseeable, and cannot comply with the standard of care suggested by those statutes.⁴

Permitting regulation in these circumstances has value even if the regulations are not always followed. Even criminal law does not prevent all crimes from occurring. UA's policies, like criminal laws, allow UA to take potentially preventative action when it becomes aware of a violation that poses a threat of harm⁵ and to respond administratively when non-criminal violations occur. This is particularly important in the high conflict circumstances common on University campuses described above. UA requests that the bill be amended to permit UA to manage in these circumstances.

Concealed Carry Permit

SB 174 also omits the requirement in Senator Coghill's 2014 bill that a person obtain a concealed handgun permit as a condition to carry a concealed handgun at the university. In 2014 the university opposed concealed carry permits as a substitute for the University's ability to manage its students, workforce and property. For the reasons discussed in the 2014 memo to Senate Finance,⁶ a permit requirement alone is not an adequate substitute for the ability to manage in the sensitive areas described above.

However, a requirement that a person obtain a permit, in addition to the requested amendments providing University authority to regulate in these sensitive areas, makes sense in the university environment. A permit would require some training and knowledge about gun safety and applicable law, and exclude individuals with certain (but not all) criminal backgrounds from obtaining a permit.

⁴ The University appreciates the fact that the bill includes an immunity provision. While that should be effective against state damage claims, that will not be much consolation if an avoidable incident occurs. State immunity also may not bar certain civil rights actions or administrative sanctions by federal agencies.

⁵ The University is a small community where information about firearm possession may be shared by roommates, classmates or by the owner, sometimes willingly to brag or intimidate, and sometimes unwittingly.

⁶ Attachment A, March 31, 2014, UA General Counsel Memo to Senate Finance, at pp.7-8.