

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 11, 2016

12:04 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Wes Keller, Chair  
Representative Liz Vazquez, Vice Chair  
Representative Jim Colver  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative David Talerico  
Representative Harriet Drummond  
Representative Ivy Spohnholz

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Cathy Tilton  
Representative Daniel Ortiz  
Representative Andy Josephson  
Representative Tammy Wilson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 174(FIN)

"An Act relating to the regulation of firearms and knives by the University of Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSSB 174(FIN) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 174

SHORT TITLE: REG. OF FIREARMS/KNIVES BY UNIV. OF AK

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) KELLY

|          |     |                                   |
|----------|-----|-----------------------------------|
| 02/08/16 | (S) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS   |
| 02/08/16 | (S) | EDC, JUD                          |
| 02/16/16 | (S) | EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205      |
| 02/16/16 | (S) | Heard & Held                      |
| 02/16/16 | (S) | MINUTE (EDC)                      |
| 02/17/16 | (S) | JUD AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg) |
| 02/17/16 | (S) | Scheduled but Not Heard           |

02/18/16 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205  
 02/18/16 (S) Heard & Held  
 02/18/16 (S) MINUTE (EDC)  
 02/23/16 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205  
 02/23/16 (S) Moved CSSB 174(EDC) Out of Committee  
 02/23/16 (S) MINUTE (EDC)  
 02/26/16 (S) EDC RPT CS 2DP 1DNP 1NR SAME TITLE  
 02/26/16 (S) DP: DUNLEAVY, HUGGINS  
 02/26/16 (S) DNP: GARDNER  
 02/26/16 (S) NR: GIESSEL  
 02/26/16 (S) FIN REFERRAL ADDED AFTER JUD  
 02/29/16 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
 02/29/16 (S) Heard & Held  
 02/29/16 (S) MINUTE (JUD)  
 03/02/16 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
 03/02/16 (S) Heard & Held  
 03/02/16 (S) MINUTE (JUD)  
 03/07/16 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
 03/07/16 (S) Moved CSSB 174(EDC) Out of Committee  
 03/07/16 (S) MINUTE (JUD)  
 03/09/16 (S) JUD RPT CS (EDC) 2DP 2NR  
 03/09/16 (S) DP: MCGUIRE, COGHILL  
 03/09/16 (S) NR: MICCICHE, WIELECHOWSKI  
 03/24/16 (S) FIN AT 1:30 PM SENATE FINANCE 532  
 03/24/16 (S) Heard & Held  
 03/24/16 (S) MINUTE (FIN)  
 04/04/16 (S) FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532  
 04/04/16 (S) Moved CSSB 174(FIN) Out of Committee  
 04/04/16 (S) MINUTE (FIN)  
 04/06/16 (S) FIN RPT CS 2DP 3NR 1AM NEW TITLE  
 04/06/16 (S) DP: KELLY, DUNLEAVY  
 04/06/16 (S) NR: MICCICHE, OLSON, HOFFMAN  
 04/06/16 (S) AM: MACKINNON  
 04/07/16 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)  
 04/07/16 (S) VERSION: CSSB 174(FIN)  
 04/08/16 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
 04/08/16 (H) EDC, JUD  
 04/08/16 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106  
 04/08/16 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --  
 04/11/16 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR PETE KELLY  
 Alaska State Legislature  
 Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the committee substitute (CS) for SB 174 (FIN), as prime sponsor.

JOE BYRNES, Staff  
Senator Pete Kelly  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the sectional analysis for the committee substitute (CS) for SB 174 (FIN) and responded to questions, on behalf of Senator Kelly, prime sponsor.

MICHAEL HOSTINA, General Council  
University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concern on the CS for SB 174(FIN).

GEORGE PIERCE  
Kasilof, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN).

MIKE COONS  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the CS for SB 174(FIN).

GREG STODDARD  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the CS for SB 174(FIN).

REGINA HOCK, Professor  
University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN).

SIMON FILHOL, Student  
University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN).

JEFFREY BENOWITZ  
University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on the CS for SB 174(FIN).

ROSS MULLINS  
Cordova, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN).

CARL KANCIR  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the CS for SB 174(FIN).

CALLIE CONNERTON, Student Body President  
University of Alaska Southeast (UAS)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN).

LORA VESS, PhD, Professor  
University of Alaska Southeast (UAS)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN).

ARLENE RONDA  
Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN).

BRIAN JUDY, Liaison  
National Rifle Association (NRA)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the CS for SB 174(FIN).

RUSSELL KELL  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on the CS for SB 174(FIN).

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[12:04:09 PM](#)

**CHAIR WES KELLER** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 12:04 p.m. Representatives Keller, Drummond, Spohnholz, Talerico, Seaton, and Vazquez were present at the call to order. Representative Colver arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**SB 174-REG. OF FIREARMS/KNIVES BY UNIV. OF AK**

[12:05:02 PM](#)

CHAIR KELLER announced that the only order of business would be CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 174(FIN), "An Act relating to the regulation of firearms and knives by the University of Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

[12:05:07 PM](#)

SENATOR PETE KELLY, Alaska State Legislature, explained the intention behind the CS for SB 174(FIN), which is to address a constitutional conflict between the University of Alaska (UA) and the people of Alaska; and he pointed out that the university is a subdivision of the state. In 2003 the ability for Alaskans to carry a concealed weapon was adopted; however, the university doesn't recognize that right and has implemented a policy restricting that freedom. Red signs designating the university as a gun-free zone are posted throughout the campus. These red signs are what is relied upon to ensure campus safety, he said, and conjectured on why this is not sufficient. The issue is constitutional and the prohibition represents overreach on the part of the university. He recalled the recent campus shootings in San Bernardino, California, [12/2/15] and said that it was the impetus to revisit the UA policy, along with other attacks across the nation that have also occurred in locales designated as gun-free zones. The state statute aligns with the Second Amendment [of the U.S. Constitution], he underscored, which doesn't allow the university to make a prohibition for bearing of arms on campus.

[12:14:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VAZQUEZ asked for justification of the \$450,000 fiscal note.

SENATOR KELLY said it will be used primarily for a study to include a security analysis, and for determining further safety measures to supplant the ineffective red signs.

12:16:36 PM

JOE BYRNES, Staff, Senator Pete Kelly, Alaska State Legislature, referred to the fiscal note to state that the figure is a reduction from the initial \$1.3 million fiscal note, based on legislative models implemented in Idaho and Utah.

12:18:16 PM

MR. BYRNES provided the sectional analysis, of the CS for SB 174(FIN) paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Section 1**

It is the findings and intent of the legislature that the right to bear arms is constitutionally protected under Art. 1, Sec. 19 of the Alaska Constitution, that the University Of Alaska Board Of Regents may not abridge that right, and the legislature reserves to the state the authority to regulate firearms.

**Section 2**

Amends AS 14.40 (The University of Alaska and the Community Colleges statutes) affirming the authority to regulate firearms and knives is reserved to the state, the Board of Regents may not regulate firearms and knives except

1. In a manner identical to state law
2. In student dormitories or other shared living quarters

The Board of Regents may adopt and enforce policies regulating the open carry of firearms, restricting the discharge, and prohibiting the possession in restricted access areas.

If the Board of Regents adopt regulation of the carrying of handguns in dormitories, the policies must require that the handgun is either carried on the person or secured in an owner provided lockbox at all times. Persons living in dormitories must declare to the University their intention to keep a weapon in their dormitory rooms. The University may privately collect and store (for not more than a year) that information. The University may use that information when making housing decisions for students who

expressed they don't want to share a dormitory room with a person who possesses a firearm.

The University is prohibited from creating a database or registry of persons who possess firearms on campus, requiring written permission before a person may possess a firearm on campus, or adopt implied consent policies regarding restricted possession on campus.

The University is immune from civil liability for policies enforced under this section.

### **Section 3**

The bill takes effect August 1, 2016

[12:21:12 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked whether there are other public spaces or public buildings where the state disallows public carry of firearms.

MR. BYRNES said the state weapons misconduct statute stipulates five prohibited spaces and the only public building where firearms are not allowed are court houses.

[12:21:56 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ questioned whether weapons are allowed in the state Capitol building.

MR. BYRNES responded that adopted policy bans firearms in the Capitol, but no law prohibits the presence of weapons. Anyone found in possession of a firearm, while in the Capitol complex, is in violation of policy but not law.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked how firearm storage will occur in the residence halls.

MR. BYRNES answered that the bill defines metal lock boxes for dormitories, and all campuses have centralized weapons storage available.

[12:24:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON said having a weapon in the Capitol is a violation of policy, and asked whether the university has a similar policy; which this bill is seeking to override.

MR. BYRNES responded that if a person were to bring a weapon onto a campus it would be similar to bringing one into the Capitol, and violate an existing policy but not a specific law.

[12:27:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND asked what are the five prohibited areas named in the weapons misconduct statute.

MR. BYRNES answered: a bar, any K-12 institution or daycare facility, domestic violence shelters, court houses, and inside another person's home without their express consent.

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND inquired about bringing a firearm onto a military base.

MR. BYRNES pointed out that all military bases are under the purview of federal law.

[12:29:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ noted the presence of childcare centers that are on most campuses.

MR. BYRNES explained that the presence of children on campus is similar to other areas where children frequent but which is an area not considered specific to the care of those children. However, a designated campus daycare facility would be a firearm prohibited area, as specified under statute.

[12:31:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND asked about the consequences for improper handling of a firearm on campus, or for leaving it unattended.

MR. BYRNES said that the expectation is for the university to draft policy and regulation for campus protocol.

[12:33:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ queried whether policy would include provisions to allow for gun-free dormitories as a means for catering to students who would prefer that type of arrangement.

MR. BYRNES explained that the students who desire to carry a firearm would register/declare its presence to university officials. If someone objects to sharing a space with someone who maintains a weapon, alternate arrangements may be made; however, the privacy of those who carry will be protected and may not allow for segregation.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ expressed concern for a student not necessarily knowing whether their assigned dormitory roommate is in possession of a firearm.

[12:35:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON directed attention to the CS page 2, [lines 9 and] 10, which read as follows:

- (c) The Board of Regents may adopt and enforce policies
  - (1) regulating the carrying of openly carried firearms;

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked for the intent of this subsection and paragraph and whether it is meant to allow concealed versus openly carried firearms.

MR. BYRNES explained that the university may adopt and enforce policies regulating the open carry of firearms, but may not prohibit the action.

[12:36:53 PM](#)

CHAIR KELLER opened public testimony.

[12:37:34 PM](#)

MICHAEL HOSTINA, General Council, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), suggested unintended consequences that may result from SB 174 including the governance of long guns, as the bill only appears to address handguns. He said thousands of students and staff are on campus and some may have mental or other troubling issues. In those specific situations, the Board of Regents would like to be able to regulate firearms. The bill requires the university to establish storage areas, which may prove costly. The state has imposed regulation of firearms for specific purposes, he noted, and added that the Board of Regents would appreciate being able to review any amendments proposed.

12:43:55 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VAZQUEZ directed attention to the CS, page 2, lines [16]-20, which read as follows:

(3) prohibiting the possession of firearms or knives in the restricted ... in university-designated rooms during adjudication of staff or student disciplinary issues and disputes;

REPRESENTATIVE VAZQUEZ pointed out that this language appears to address some of Mr. Hostina's concerns.

12:44:57 PM

GEORGE PIERCE stated opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN) and said if guns aren't allowed in the Capitol why should young people be allowed to carry on campus. The bill is backed by members of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) he pointed out, and opined, it's trying to fix something that isn't broken. The students and faculty members have stated opposition, and he suggested the members listen to the collective voices.

12:47:35 PM

MIKE COONS, stated support for the CS for SB 174(FIN), paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I have testified in the Senate hearings for SB 174 and have, like the Senators endured the fear, the flat out lies of the anti-gun talking points as well as the foreign students/facility and Alaskan facility that threaten to leave if this passes. As Senator Kelly said to the later, don't let the door hit them in the ... on the way out!

What really gets me, is the audacity that some preface their testimony that they hunt, they own guns but they oppose the armed citizen on campus because they don't trust their fellow gun owners! They use the "I hunt, or target shoot" as a ruse. The 2nd Amendment and Article 1 section 19 is not about hunting, target shooting or collecting, it about our fundamental freedom against any form of tyrants, be that an out

of control government or a criminal bent on serious harm or death to me or others.

Thus, any whom call in with this ruse, I am calling out as a flat out liar or an elitist like Rosie O'Donnell who thinks only they can own a firearm but not the rest of us lowly peasants. What they don't understand, nor will they admit is that we whom stand for our God given rights as recognized by our founding fathers, shall prevail!

[12:49:11 PM](#)

GREG STODDARD, stated support for the CS for SB 174(FIN), stating that the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Article 1, Section 19 of the state constitution are being disregarded by the universities policy. He reported that he works on campus and was ignored by the Board of Regents' policy makers, when he approached them with questions regarding firearms. He opined:

No law or policy prevents acts of terror by armed aggressors. Current laws already provide the avenue of accountability for those who would abuse the rights of others. SB 174 provides for generous regulatory policy making [in order] to address ... concerns.

[12:51:15 PM](#)

REGINA HOCK, Professor, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), stated opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN), and said campus firearm regulations should reflect other restricted areas such as courtrooms, K-12 schools, party conventions, military bases, and the Capitol. The university is a place of learning and exploring, which can lead to controversies and heated exchanges as part of the learning process. These arguments need to be conducted in a safe setting to allow for full expression, and this bill, if passed, would remove that sense of safety. Faculty members often cause major distress to students via assignment of a low grade, failing a course, or termination of status. In a large class it is not unusual for students to be frustrated by the grades they receive, and in some cases psychological and anger issues are evident. Further, students may arrive in class while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or in an angry state of mind. She said she is dismayed and scared by the possibility of such students bringing weapons to her class or office; more frightened than for the possible

occurrence of a rare, mass shooting. An impulse reaction by a student due to mental issues, alcohol, and anger is frightening. Freedom of speech will be compromised if there is fear of offending someone, and that fear will adversely affect the climate of teaching and learning at the university. The vast majority of faculty, college presidents, Board of Regents, campus police, unions, and staff council do not want this bill. She urged the committee to heed the majority voice of those who will be directly affected, and not pass SB 174.

[12:53:15 PM](#)

SIMON FILHOL, Student, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), stated opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN), and said the campus is an open area for debate and discussion, where anyone's beliefs and values can be expressed and challenged, as a necessary part of the academic process. Allowing firearms implies a hierarchy between those who carry guns and those who don't; restricting some people's freedom to express their opinion. He said that, as a student coming from out of state, his decision to enroll would have been different had he known firearms would be present in a classroom. Others may decide to not attend, should this legislation prevail, he opined, and urged members not to support SB 174.

[12:54:57 PM](#)

JEFFREY BENOWITZ, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), testified on the CS for SB 174(FIN), paraphrasing from a prepared statement, and said:

Humans are really bad at risk assessment. They're scared of sharks, lightening, and snakes, where bees lead to far more death. Humans are also bad on safety assessment. The UA regents has banned marijuana on campus for safety reasons. The UA regents has banned tobacco on campus for safety reasons. Almost all sexual assaults on campus involve alcohol, yet the UA regents allow alcohol on campus. ... I suggest an amendment to SB 174 that bans the presence of alcohol in campus buildings when guns are present. ... Excess drinking and guns do not mix well. Please amend SB 174 so that it bans the presence of alcohol in campus buildings when guns are present. University of Alaska students will make the right choice when given the option: will choose firearm possession which is a right, over alcohol which is a permission.

12:56:40 PM

ROSS MULLINS stated opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN), and said:

I have four children who have attended college, and if I had known of a legal firearms carry on any college campus they wished to attend, I would have prevented that from happening. I think this bill is insanity and I don't think your judgement on this is a responsible one if this bill were to continue through the process. I think Senator Kelly and his ideological framework is flawed. The constitution, which ... relegated firearms to armed militias, is not being properly construed. If you see fit to keep promoting this bill, I would be very distressed.

12:58:31 PM

CARL KANCIR stated support for the CS for SB 174(FIN), and said the point of a concealed weapon is so that no one knows you are carrying. Thus, a roommate would not know. However, if it is required that someone register their concealed weapon on campus, it changes the picture. He conjectured that a terrorist planning to shoot-up the campus could access the registration information and initially target anyone with a concealed weapon. A nine shot revolver can be emptied in three seconds, and the response time for campus police is between one and two minutes. In 60-120 seconds, the number of shots that could be fired would put many lives in jeopardy. I'm not in favor of anyone knowing whether someone is carrying a concealed weapon or not. The chances of someone responding with a firearm to a bad grade or due to a disagreement is perhaps more rare than a terrorist coming onto campus, he opined.

1:00:53 PM

CALLIE CONNERTON, Student Body President, University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), stated opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN), paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I am a student at the University of Alaska Southeast and serve as the Student Government President here in Juneau and as the Statewide Coalition of Student Leaders Vice-Chair.

There are two big reasons that I'm here before you opposing SB 174. First, a campus is no place for guns, and second, contrary to what you've been told, this bill does have fiscal impact and Alaska's students can't afford it. Major stakeholders - from students, the university president and Board of Regents to school faculty - oppose this dangerous and expensive legislation.

Let me explain why a Campus is no place for guns. Colleges and universities are relatively safe from gun violence - but campus life has other risk factors that makes the presence of guns dangerous. What are those risk factors?

- Alcohol and Drugs: Alcohol leads to impaired judgment about whether to shoot a gun, as well as impaired aim when firing. And a Columbia University study found that half of U.S. college students binge drink or abuse illegal or prescription drugs.

- Suicide: College students are at elevated risk of firearm suicide: The firearm suicide rate of 18 to 21 year-olds is nine times higher than the firearm suicide rate of people 17 and under. And suicide attempts with guns are far more successful than other suicide attempts. Here in Alaska, we have huge problems with Seasonal Affective Disorder, which also leads to depression in our students.

- Gun Homicide: People age 18-20 represent 4.4 percent of the total U.S. population but commit 17 percent of all gun homicides.

- Some students might be responsible gun owners, however, there are often situations where they are in close proximity with students who don't know have knowledge of responsible gun handling or think of guns as a toy. We don't want students to have easy access to a gun if they will not be responsible.

- There is also no concealed carried permit that is required in this bill, with would allow someone to be able to carry without proper knowledge as long as they have not done anything in the past warranting them to no pass a background check.

My final point is that students will end up paying for guns on campus and with the budget crunch we're under, it's irresponsible to pass a bill that will cost students money.

When the gun lobby went to Idaho and told them to pass a guns on campus bill they said it wouldn't cost anything, but they were wrong. It cost 3.7 million dollars. I have the article right here and I'm happy to give you copies. Not only did it cost 3.7 million dollars for their few colleges and universities to comply, but it was paid for on the backs of students because the state was in the middle of a budget crunch and they wouldn't allocate money to the increased security costs. I can't afford to pay for this legislation and neither can my fellow students.

I respectfully ask you to vote no on SB 174.

[1:03:40 PM](#)

LORA VESS, PhD, Professor, University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), stated opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN), paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I am a resident of Juneau. I am also an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Alaska Southeast. I am a faculty member strongly opposed to Senate Bill 174. I submit this as a reflection of my personal values and experiences rather than as a representative of UAS, but I know that many faculty, staff, and students share this position.

First, this is an unfunded mandate in a time of budgetary shortfalls. According to the Idaho Statesman, Idaho is looking at an additional cost of \$3.7 million for required metal detectors, employee training, and additional staff for five campuses after its campus carry law went into effect. The Houston Chronicle reported that the Texas law is estimated to cost up to \$47 million over six years for the University of Houston and University of Texas systems to update security, build gun lockers, and prepare campus police.

On a personal level, I am not anti-gun ownership or use. I grew up in a small Virginia community and recognize their value for hunting and protection. I attended Virginia Tech for my undergraduate degree. I had friends and former professors who were on campus the day of the shootings and I worried anxiously until news of their safety emerged. I was also a resident advisor while at Virginia Tech and I lived and worked in West Ambler Johnston, in the actual dorm room where two people were killed. I have also been mugged, unarmed, at gunpoint. However, even in light of these experiences, I strongly believe that institutions of higher education are not the appropriate setting to wage a battle over rights to possess firearms. Many of my students are struggling to find their adult identity and develop a sense of self. This does not need to be complicated by adding another potentially explosive variable into their transition from adolescence to adulthood.

As a professor, I care deeply about my students and creating and protecting a safe learning environment. On the best of days on campus, my students are engaged, invigorated, and a joy to be around. However, they don't always have the best of days. Some of them are coping with depression, anxiety, and drug and alcohol problems. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports that about 4 out of 5 college students drink alcohol, with about half of those engaging in binge drinking. On Thursday, February 18th, I provided oral testimony during the Senate Education Committee public hearing in opposition to Senate Bill 174. Almost every person providing testimony in opposition to SB 174 at the hearing referenced their grave concerns regarding the emotional and mental health of Alaskan university students and the correlated increase in risks were firearms to become more readily accessible. Some of those supporting the bill expressed the opinion that college students are adults and should be treated as such. However, the brains of adolescents are still developing (and continue to do so through one's early-to-mid-twenties). Many adolescents and young adults do not have the emotional maturity and psychological development needed for responsible firearm use, especially in high-density settings. Young adults have high rates of depression and anxiety. Certain mental

health problems – such as schizophrenia or bi-polar disorder – have early adult-onset and may emerge during the college years. As you are certainly aware, Alaska suicide rates are among the highest in the nation with suicide as the second leading cause of death for U.S. college students. Greater access to firearms will likely increase that rate and certainly not diminish it.

At the hearing, several citizens and committee members expressed concern about sexual assault and rape on campus. The Committee is right to be concerned: 1 in 5 women (and 1 in 16 men) are targets of attempted or completed sexual assault while they are college students. However, the vast majority of assaults are not taking place in dark corridors or in parking lots leaving night class. In 90 percent of reported cases, the victim knew her or his attacker. Moreover, 89 percent of assaults occur when the survivor is incapacitated due to alcohol. We have a serious problem with sexual assault and intimate partner violence in Alaska, but our solutions lie with greater education, respect for women, and preventative measures. Arming women on campus will not protect them from sexual violence, especially when it is equally likely that their assailants may be armed.

My concern is that the legislative response with this bill is not reflective of any systematic understanding of the roots of violence on university campuses. Instead, I am concerned that this bill is ideologically driven with a narrow conceptualization of freedom and liberty that has nothing to do the operations and needs of Alaska's universities, or of the safety of the thousands of students, faculty, staff, visitors, and minors who are on Alaskan campuses on any given day.

Supporters create hypothetical scenarios where an armed vigilante emerges as victorious in the face of danger, but they refuse to consider non-storybook endings to that fictional scenario. Even for those experienced gun owners, what experience do they have with mental illness, what knowledge do they have of campus security or the university of environment, what skill do they have in aiming for a gunmen in a classroom of chaos or cafeteria full of visiting,

confused, and screaming school children? How will they respond to parties fueled with alcohol acting in unpredictable ways with their own guns in hand? This bill presumes that those with concealed carry permits are trained and psychologically able to respond to active shooters in a calm, safe manner. If an active shooter situation arises on campus, I trust the police to respond to the situation. I am greatly concerned that with more firearms on campus, injuries and causality rates could quickly escalate as innocent people are caught in the crossfire.

This bill introduces unknown dangers to university staff and faculty (risks, I might add that legislators are protected from). Professors regularly teach difficult and sensitive topics that some students find challenging and are not always able to process in a calm manner. It is the job of a professor to evaluate students and this places them in a vulnerable position. I cannot think of a day where I did not cover a sensitive or controversial topic in the class. As a sociologist, I teach about and encourage critical thinking related to human behavior and society. In this role, my students learn about sexual harassment and violence. In my classrooms, I regularly "discipline" my students for a range of activities—from talking while others are speaking to playing on their phones. While I am not a therapist, I counsel students on practical educational advice such as developing good study habits and applying to graduate school applications—to more personal matters, such as coping with loss or experiences with sexism.

Certain members of the legislature seems to think there is no reason that universities should have the right to restrict or deny concealed carry on campuses. I find that absolutely baffling given the unique cultural and educational climate of the UA system as described in the breadth of testimony from those of us who work, teach, learn, and visit University of Alaska campuses on a regular basis.

I strongly urge the legislature to reject SB 174.

[1:06:09 PM](#)

ARLENE RONDA stated opposition to the CS for SB 174(FIN), and stressed the importance for the committee to vote no on this

bill. The trained security personnel should be the only ones authorized to have guns on campus, she opined.

[1:06:51 PM](#)

BRIAN JUDY, Liaison, National Rifle Association (NRA), stated support for the CS for SB 174(FIN), and said self-defense is a fundamental right. The bill will erase the arbitrary lines that currently prohibit a person from choosing a means of self-protection, and end gun-free zones on Alaska's campuses. Gun-free school zones have proven to be a public policy failure, if not a public policy disaster, he opined. Mass killings occur in designated gun-free zones, which are only respected by law abiding citizens. A gun-free zone creates an area where only the potential victims are gun-free. Eight states currently allow guns as a means of self-protection on college campuses and the catastrophic predictions have not come to fruition. The concern for concealed guns is an irrational fear that some people hold, and they would like to suppress the ability of others to make the choice to carry a firearm. The bill restricts open carry, and the age in Alaska to carry a concealed firearm is 21. Thus, the dorm issue is irrelevant as few over the age of 21 live in dormitories. The bill also restricts guns from specific campus areas of concern, as previously cited. The financial issues are overblown, he opined, and denied that the students in Idaho footed the bill. Finally, he said, consider the financial impact if a tragedy were to occur on a UA campus. After the [Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia; shooting on April 16, 2007] tragedy, the university was found liable and ordered to pay \$11 million in victim restitution.

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RUSSELL KELL testified on the CS for SB 174(FIN), noting that no law prohibits the carrying of concealed handguns at UA, however, the campus policy imposes that restriction; a lesson to students that it's alright to ignore constitutional rights. People may not feel safe, but the question is whether or not they are actually safe, he opined. Finally, he suggested that UA admissions could provide more scrutiny of who is being admitted.

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CHAIR KELLER closed public testimony.

[1:12:53 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked what impact the law might have on the university risk management insurance rates.

MR. JUDY deferred.

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REPRESENTATIVE SEATON cited his longtime membership in the National Rifle Association (NRA), as well as being a legislative yes vote on the statute enacting concealed carry without a permit. However, he opined, the Board of Regents' ability to set campus policy should be respected, and said he could not support the bill.

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REPRESENTATIVE VAZQUEZ moved to report the committee (CS) for SB 174(FIN), Version 29-LS1306\G, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

[1:16:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND objected for discussion, and asked whether the fiscal note would require adoption.

CHAIR KELLER said the fiscal note will be attached with passage of the bill.

[1:17:33 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON noted that the university requested a bill version that would require the issuance of permits to students carrying firearms on campus, which would insure appropriate training was in place, and make this legislation supportable.

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REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND maintained her objection.

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CHAIR KELLER called for a vote, but upon determining there was further committee comment, ruled the vote as void.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ expressed an inability to vote yea or nay, due to the lack of a response to her previously stated question, which could represent a determining factor.

CHAIR KELLER called for a vote.

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A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Keller, Talerico, Vazquez and Colver voted in favor of reporting the CS for SB 174(FIN) from committee. Representatives Seaton, Drummond, and Spohnholz voted against it. Therefore, CSSB 174(FIN) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee by a vote of 4-3.

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**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 1:20 p.m.