

Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus

a project of GunFreeKids.org

December 1, 2008

Re: Guns on College Campuses

Dear [REDACTED]

We write to alert you to a potential threat to America's colleges and universities, including [REDACTED]. Following school shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007 and Northern Illinois University in 2008, the gun lobby is promoting legislation that would prohibit state supported colleges and universities from adopting policies that regulate firearms on campus. This legislation would preempt a school's current policies restricting firearms on campus and allow students to possess and carry concealed handguns – in classrooms, dormitories, and sporting events and other school activities.

This threat should be taken very seriously. One state – Utah – has already passed such legislation. The Utah law prohibits state institutions of higher education from adopting or enforcing any “policy pertaining to firearms that in anyway inhibits or restricts the possession or use of firearms on either public or private property.” The Utah law explicitly prohibits state educational institutions from keeping guns out of student dormitories. The University of Utah, which strongly opposed the law, is now compelled to allow students to carry firearms on its campus.

The Utah law has become the model for similar bills introduced in Ohio and 16 other states in 2008 – Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington. It is likely that the gun lobby's legislation will be reintroduced when the Ohio legislature convenes in 2009.

The **Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus** is writing to colleges and universities across the country to urge them to band together to oppose the gun lobby's agenda to push guns into college campuses. **Please indicate your opposition to legislation that would mandate that colleges and universities allow students to carry concealed handguns on campus by signing and returning the enclosed resolution (Enclosure 1).** We will provide a list of colleges and universities that are opposed to such legislation to lawmakers in all states to discourage them from considering such legislation.

The case against allowing guns on college campuses is strong. Numerous studies have shown that whenever guns are introduced into an environment, e.g., the home, the workplace, etc., the

result is more gun deaths and injuries. It stands to reason that introducing guns into college campuses would only increase the risk of gun violence to students, faculty, and staff.

We have enclosed material from the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence that provides compelling reasons why it would be dangerous to introduce guns into colleges and universities (Enclosure 2). For additional information, we refer you to the Brady Campaign's in-depth report *No Gun Left Behind: The Gun Lobby's Campaign to Push Guns Into Colleges and Schools*. A copy of this report may be downloaded at www.bradycampaign.org/gunsoncampus.

Another resource in this fight is a paper by Students for Gun Free Schools, *Why Our Campuses Are Safer Without Concealed Handguns*, available at www.studentsforgunfreeschools.org.

The gun lobby does not make idle threats. Now is the time to take action to protect the right of [REDACTED] to adopt policies that prohibit or restrict firearms on campus. We urge you to help in the fight against the gun lobby's plan by signing and returning the enclosed resolution.

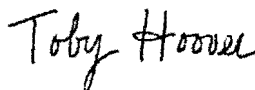
We applaud your efforts to keep college campuses safe and free from gun violence. Please allow us to help America's colleges and universities work together to keep it that way.

Sincerely,



Andy Pelosi, President
GunFreeKids.org

Sincerely,



Toby Hoover, Executive Director
Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence

cc: Office of Student Affairs
Campus Security

The Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus is supported by the following organizations: The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and its network of Million Mom March Chapters; Coalition to Stop Gun Violence; States United to Prevent Gun Violence; Freedom States Alliance; New England Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence; Protest Easy Guns; and Students for Gun Free Schools.

Founded in 2007, **GunFreeKids.org** (GFK) is an Internet-based 501(c) 4 issue advocacy organization, which provides tools for people to take action on pending state and national legislation and assists voters nationwide in learning about and supporting state-based candidates who favor sound gun violence prevention policies.

**Colleges and Universities
Opposed to Guns on Campus**

Whereas, following school shootings at Virginia Tech (2007) and Northern Illinois University (2008), the gun lobby's response was to promote legislation that would prohibit colleges and universities across the country from restricting firearms on college campuses and allow students to possess and carry concealed handguns; and

Whereas, legislation has been introduced in at least 17 states would prohibit colleges and universities from adopting policies that regulate possession of firearms on campus; and

Whereas, one state -- Utah -- passed legislation in 2004 that prohibits public schools or state institutions of higher education from adopting or enforcing any "policy pertaining to firearms that in anyway inhibits or restricts the possession or use of firearms on either public or private property," and

Whereas, colleges and universities have a legal duty to adopt policies to promote a safe environment for students, faculty, and staff, and

Whereas, the vast majority of educational and law enforcement professionals believe that prohibiting firearms on college campuses, except by trained security officers, is an essential element of an overall school safety plan; therefore

_____ is opposed to legislation that would
(Name of Institution)
preempt its right to prohibit or adopt policies to regulate possession of firearms on campus.

Signed

Date

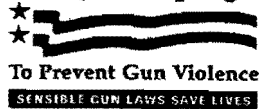
Title

Please sign and return by mail, fax, or email to:

**Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus
GunFreeKids.org
PO Box 658
Croton Falls, NY 10519**

Fax: 914-485-2191

Email: andy@gunfreekids.org



The Case Against Guns On Campus¹

There are many reasons why it would be dangerous to introduce guns into colleges and universities. The college age years – 18-24 – are among the most volatile periods in a person's life. As such, these are the peak years for abusing alcohol and drugs, attempting suicide, having other mental health problems, and committing gun crimes. Students who engage in binge drinking and drug abuse put themselves and others at risk. If guns are involved, it is more likely that these situations will result in serious injury or death.

Reason #1. Arming Students Would Make Campuses More Dangerous Every Hour of Every Day

- **Binge drinking and drug abuse.** College students engage in a great many high-risk behaviors – including binge drinking and drug abuse – at alarming rates. Nearly half of America's full-time college students abuse drugs or binge drink at least once a month. For college gun owners, the rate of binge-drinking is even higher – two-thirds.
- **Suicide and mental health issues.** College students are also at elevated risks for suicide, with about 1,100 successful suicides and an additional 24,000 attempts every year. If a gun is used in a suicide attempt, more than 90% of the time it is fatal, compared to a 3% fatality rate for suicide attempts by drug overdose. This is why guns in the home increase the risks of suicide fivefold. How many more suicide fatalities will we see on college campuses if guns become widely available?
- **Accidental shootings and gun thefts.** Studies show that guns in the home are far more likely to be used in an unintentional shooting than in self-defense. In addition, even trained gun owners often do not realize that a gun is loaded. This often happens with pistols where the ammunition magazine is removed, but a hidden bullet remains in the chamber, ready to kill. Guns stolen from homes and cars fuel crime. College dorm rooms, by comparison, would be even easier targets for gun thieves. Guns are also often taken and used in suicides.

Reason #2. Armed Students Would Be Accountable to No One

- **Colleges have duty to protect safety of students.** College administrators and campus law enforcement have a duty to protect the safety of students, faculty, and visitors on college campuses. Indeed, schools can be held liable for failing to take adequate security measures or otherwise failing to maintain a sufficiently safe environment. According, armed campus law enforcement officers are thoroughly trained to handle crisis situations, when and when not to fire their guns, and how to best secure the campus environment.
- **Gun owners do not.** College gun owners operate under none of these constraints. They are accountable only for the safety of themselves. If, in a shootout they miss the shooter and hit other students – an extremely likely scenario given that even trained police officers, on average, hit their intended targets less than 20% of the time – they will claim self-defense and claim no responsibility, even if they have directly caused the death of a fellow student. For this reason, security professionals believe that arming students to shoot back would actually make matters worse in the extremely rare instances where mass shootings occur on campus.

¹ All facts herein have been sourced in our in-depth report *No Gun Left Behind: The Gun Lobby's Campaign to Push Guns Into Colleges and Schools* (Brady Center 2007), available at www.bradycampaign.org/gunsoncampus.

- **College gun owners have been proven to be dangerous.** Harvard researchers have shown college gun owners to be highly irresponsible. They are more likely than the average student to:
 - Engage in binge drinking,
 - Need an alcoholic drink first thing in the morning,
 - Use cocaine or crack,
 - Be arrested for a DUI,
 - Vandalize property, and
 - Get in trouble with police.

Reason #3. Arming Students Would Not Deter the Rare Campus Shooting

- **Suicidal attackers cannot be deterred.** The perpetrators of mass shootings are nearly always suicidal, and end up taking their own lives at the end of their rampages. Armed students would likely become the first targets of any suicidal attackers, who can prepare for such an attack by maximizing their firepower. For example, a crazed gunman who attacked a city council outside St. Louis, Missouri, in March 2008, first shot and killed two armed police officers before continuing his rampage. He even used one of the officer's guns in furthering his attack.

Reason #4. Academic Debate Cannot Flourish In a Room Full of Guns

- **Freedom of expression.** Protecting free expression of teachers and students is the most obvious way in which academic freedom must be secured. Teachers must be able to address even the most controversial subjects, in their research and writing endeavors as well as in the classroom, without fear that they will be punished for challenging conventional thought or espousing provocative ideas. Students must have the same ability to pursue knowledge without risk of being penalized or restrained by those who might disagree with the students' views. All of these cherished values of our educational process would be greatly diminished if college classrooms were filled with armed students and teachers.
- **Self-governance.** The U.S. Supreme Court has recognized the importance of respecting schools' rights to self-governance and independent decision-making. This principle of institutional autonomy has been enshrined in the constitutions of many states. Thus, college administrations must be free to set their own policies with respect to firearms.

Reason #5. There Are Better Ways to Make College Campuses Safer

- **Campuses are safer than surrounding communities.** Despite the horrific shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois, college campuses are far safer than the communities that surround them. Ninety three percent of the violence against college students occurs off campus, where guns are widely available. To prevent future mass shootings, we must strengthen our gun laws to make it as hard as possible for dangerous people to get dangerous weapons.
- **Strengthen background checks, don't arm everyone.** The shooter at Virginia Tech was a prohibited purchaser whose disqualifying records were not in the Brady background check system when he bought the guns he used. Since then, Congress has enacted legislation to encourage states to put more records of those too dangerous to buy a gun for mental health reasons into that system. Congress should go farther, however, and extend the Brady background checks to private sales at gun shows to make it harder for dangerous people to arm themselves. Such actions will complement and support other safety strategies that colleges and universities have adopted in the wake of Virginia Tech.