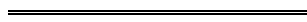


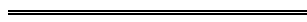
The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas



Banning of Handguns on College Campuses in the State of Texas



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

The State of Texas does not allow the carrying of handguns on the campuses of institutions of higher education at this time. Some feel they should be allowed to carry handguns for the safety and security of the people; however, firearms cause more of a problem, rather than a solution. The allowance of handguns on the campuses of institutions of higher education can hinder the learning process in classrooms, place students with mental illness in reach of handguns, place untrained people with handguns in situations they are not prepared for, and, if an emergency situation arises, such as an active shooter, can cause confusion among police officers when responding.

There are many counter points argued when discussing this issue. Some of these counter points would be that it would make the institution of higher education a safer place. Another counter point to banning handguns on campus would be that it is the 2nd amendment right of each citizen to carry a handgun. While these are valid points, there are other arguments that would suggest otherwise.

Taking into consideration that institutions of higher education are primarily for learning, the safety of the students and staff need to be considered. The learning environment needs to remain free from the threat of weapons in the classroom. After researching the topic of handguns on campuses of institutes of higher education, the State of Texas should continue to ban the possession of firearms on the campuses of institutions of higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

There have been many publicized events throughout the United States involving shootings on college campuses that have made the public and law makers question whether to keep the banning of handguns on college campuses in effect. Texas law does not allow the carrying of handguns on college campuses (Tex. Health & Safety Code 46.03, 2013). A few of these events are the shootings at Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Northern Illinois University.

According to Funk and Wagnall's New World Encyclopedia (2015), "two teenagers killed 13 people and wounded more than 20 at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The incident drew worldwide attention. It led to widespread discussion over gun control and the prevention of school violence" (para. 1). In the incident at Virginia Tech, "left 33 people dead, including the shooter, Seung-Hui Cho. It was one of the deadliest mass shootings in the United States" ("Virginia Tech," 2016, para. 1). In the incident at Northern Illinois University, "a lone gunman opened fire in a lecture hall of more than 150 students, killing 5 people and injuring 18 others before fatally shooting himself" (Palus, Fang, & Prawitz, 2012, p. 13). In all these incidents, the shooter or shooters killed themselves after they committed these acts of violence.

These incidents have placed a public eye on handguns on campus, and several organizations have attempted to lift the ban of handguns on campuses. This law is very important for the safety of college campuses. The ban on handguns continues to make campuses safe and secure, free from the worry of who is carrying a handgun. There are several reasons why the ban on handguns on campuses is extremely important. Several of those reasons are the increase of mental illness and stress among college

students, the lack of training required to obtain a concealed handgun license, the training of police actions when responding to an active shooter situation, and the fact that police would have a difficult time identifying the aggressor in a critical situation. For these reasons, the State of Texas should continue the ban of firearms on college campuses.

POSITION

A college campus is no place for handguns. College campuses are places for education and learning. Students, faculty, staff, and visitors have the right to be on a college campus without worrying if someone next to them is carrying a handgun and if they know how to use it. The safety of the campus is the responsibility of police officers who are trained to handle critical situations, not an untrained person who may not be ready to handle an extremely stressful situation.

College campuses are filled with young adults and professionals. For most of the students attending college, this is their first time living away from home, being self-sufficient, and it can be extremely stressful times. As stated by Thompson et al. (2013), "college students who are experiencing acute stress, and who are in an age group that has the highest rate of binge drinking, may use a firearm to resolve personal problems in a fatal manner that might otherwise not be fatal" (p. 244). During their college years, students are subjected to stress with class, assignments, papers, exams, and fitting in. That is not including what stresses they have to face with their family and their friends in college. Some students cannot handle the stress and may turn to suicide. By allowing handguns on campus, this could give a student who is not thinking straight quick access to a handgun when attempting suicide. According to Doubleday (2013), "groups that

oppose guns on campuses say that alcohol and drug use and higher rates of suicide among students are among their chief concerns” (p. A14).

Also during their college years, students may find out they have a mental illness. Mental illness played a part of many active shooter situations, including Virginia Tech. As stated by Purcell (2012), “on April 16, 2007, Seung-Hui Cho, a mentally unstable Virginia Tech student, killed 32 people in a flurry of gunfire, before turning the gun on himself” (p. 231). Symptoms of mental illness can start showing in a young adult even if they have not shown any previous signs. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, “Half of all lifetime cases begin by age 14; three quarters have begun by age 24. Thus, mental disorders are really the chronic diseases of the young” (“Mental Illness Exacts,” 2005, para. 6).

Included in mental disorders is depression. Avison and McAlpine’s work stated, “Depression is a disorder which is very frequently in most of the societies, especially among students. These causes refuse students from fantastic possibilities for success, career and an appealing upcoming” (as cited in Ghaedi & Kosnin, 2014, p. 39). If a student is depressed, then access to a handgun could be more convenient, if allowed on a college campus, from either a roommate or a friend. Adding handguns into the mix of stress and mental illness is risking the safety of students, faculty, and staff.

Another issue to look at is the amount of training required to obtain a concealed handgun license (CHL). The Texas Department of Public Safety is responsible for issuing the CHL. According to the Texas CHL website, “to obtain a Concealed Handgun License in the State of Texas you must complete a minimum 4 to 6-hour course, qualify with a handgun in accordance with the DPS course of fire, and pass a 25

question exam” (Greene, n.d. para. 2). In order to show handgun proficiency, a person must qualify with a handgun with a score of 70. If a person does everything required, then they are issued their CHL. No further classroom or handgun proficiency is required throughout the time they are licensed. A CHL is valid for four years the first time a person obtains a license. When a person’s license expires and they renew it, the CHL is then valid for five years from that point on (Greene, Texas CHL Frequently Asked Questions, n.d. para. 2). That means, if a CHL is obtained, then renewed twice, a CHL holder will be licensed for 14 years but have to only shown proficiency with a handgun once. This is who could possibly be carrying a handgun on a college campus and who could be using that handgun in a classroom full of people running in an attempt to escape if a shooting situation occurred.

Something else to consider in continuing the ban against handguns on college campuses is the training police departments across the nation are receiving in reference to responding to an active shooter situation. Police officers are being trained to form a group of officers, then rush into the area where the shooting is occurring, identifying the person or persons with the gun by sight, and then shooting the person without any verbal commands or warning. According to Schweit (2013), “the 16-hour Basic Active-Shooter Course, one of several courses offered, prepares first responders to isolate, distract, and end the threat when an active shooter is engaged” (p. 2). If handguns were allowed on campus and officers were responding to a shooting situation, this can cause confusion and the inability for officers to identify who the actual threat is, causing more time for a shooter to continue killing. This could also lead to police officers shooting the wrong person if a handgun was displayed by someone attempting to shoot

the aggressor. Even survivors of Virginia Tech agree with this statement. In an article by Weinberg (2013), he spoke to a survivor, John Wood, of the Virginia Tech shooting. Weinberg (2013) stated that Wood told him “giving faculty members and students the right to carry guns in the classroom would distract, not help, during a potential mass shooting because people with guns might cloud police officers’ judgment on identifying suspects” (p. 27).

COUNTER POSITION

Although it makes perfect sense to keep handguns off of college campuses, there are some who argue that having handguns on campuses would make it a safer place. According to Bennett, Kraft, and Grubb (2012), “in the aftermath of such incidents, the issue of self-defense, campus security, and threats to student safety have resonated throughout public safety forums, educational institutions, and most recently, lawmaking bodies” (p. 336). There are others, such as LeBanc, Melear, and Hemphill (2014), who say, “should a situation involving an active shooter arise, the lawfully armed would be in an ideal position to step in and assist authorities, thereby protecting themselves and potentially saving lives in the process” (p. 408).

These are good points that may in fact make campuses a safer place; however, allowing handguns on campus could actually make campuses more dangerous than what they are now. Crimes involving handguns could increase if handguns were accepted on campuses. According to Bouffard, Nobles, Wells, and Cavanaugh (2012), “opponents argue that lifting bans would lead to more guns on campus, which would increase the chances for negative consequences, including accidental shootings, suicides, and various forms of criminal behavior involving guns” (p. 320). A person may

disagree with this statement, arguing that people who are handling guns would be careful while making college campuses safe. Although that might be the case, it is not. There have been a number of accidental shootings on college campuses. Schwarz (2014) reported, "A professor at Idaho State University in Pocatello accidentally fired his concealed gun Wednesday, shooting himself in the foot" (para. 1).

This is not the only accidental shooting on a college campus. There are numerous articles about the discharging of guns on campuses. Another incident where a gun was accidentally discharged occurred on the campus of the University of Arkansas. According to Bartholomew (2013), "a work-study student employed at KUAF wounded his hand a little after 12:30 p.m. when a handgun he had in his day pack discharged" (para. 2). These examples demonstrate what could be happening on college campuses across Texas if handguns were freely allowed to be carried.

After looking at accidental shootings, the question arises as to whether handguns on college campuses could still make it a safer place by students who are armed stopping the attacker. After reviewing an article entitled *Guns on Campus: The Developing Trend in State Legislation*, ABC's 20/20 tried to put this idea to the test. They had a group of college aged people with different degrees trained by the police on how to use the handgun, who were given handguns with fake bullets and told they may have to use it at a later time. At an undetermined time, they had an armed gunman enter their class and start shooting. It was found that, "many students froze. Half could not retrieve the handgun in time, and none of the students, even the one with hundreds of hours of experience with handguns, could shoot the attacker. Many were themselves hit" (as cited in Cunningham, 2011, p. 74).

Instead of making college campuses a safer place, the opportunity to add gun related crimes are increased. Take for example a student who might drop their handgun from their waistband or backpack. Some might say this would not happen, but this same thing occurred in Florida. According to an article entitled *Guns on College Campuses* (2009), "Daytona Beach police recently arrested a Bethune-Cookman University student for felony possession of a firearm on campus. The student, since expelled, was spotted by a campus security officer when he dropped a semi-automatic pistol from his shorts" (p. 25). This brings up another possibility. If this were to have happened where guns were allowed on campus, the question would have to be asked as to whether anyone would have given it a second thought. The possibility of no one notifying law enforcement because other students may think guns are okay on a college campus might miss the opportunity to report a gunman before they go on a shooting rampage.

Another argument on having the ban of handguns lifted on college campuses is the Second Amendment argument, the right to bear arms (U.S. Const. amend. II). It has been argued that the ban on handguns on college campuses is unconstitutional, infringing on this Second Amendment right. According to Birnbaum (2013), "the basic philosophical premise for MoreGuns is that self-defense is an inherent right that should not be compromised just because someone happens to be on a college campus" (p. 7). If the constitution of the United States gives its citizens rights, they should be able to use those rights.

Although this argument is valid, there are other things to think about such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of learning and debate. The allowance of

handguns in the classroom could put restraints on these things. A teacher may avoid a subject because of the heated feelings of their students, fearing someone might get so angry they could pull out a firearm they were allowed. According to Sinor (2014), “a feminist speaker’s decision to cancel her appearance at Utah State University is one of the first clear examples of how laws allowing concealed weapons can thwart academic freedom and First Amendment rights” (p. 2). This is a clear example of how handguns on campus can stop the freedom of speech and stop someone from expressing their views in fear of a handgun being used against them.

RECOMMENDATION

When considering the safety and security of college campuses, the State of Texas should continue the ban of handguns on college campuses. College campuses need to be places where a student can go to learn and not worry who is carrying a handgun and if they are trained to use it. Students go to college to continue their education, not to be robbed of free debate and free speech by the possibility of fearing retaliation by expressing their thoughts and views.

There are many reasons why the ban on handguns on college campuses should remain in effect. The main reasons stated in this paper are mental illness and stress among college students, lack of training in order to obtain a CHL, and police training which could lead to a delay in identifying the true aggressor. Making handguns more accessible to those in mental crisis is a bad idea. The training for CHL holders is very minimal and only requires a person to demonstrate their shooting ability in a stress free environment once. Training for police officers teaches them to go into a crisis situation and neutralize the situation as quickly as possible, without asking people to put their

guns down. College students are under enough stress without having to worry about the person next to them possibly carrying a handgun, if they are trained properly to use it, and what they would do in a high stress situation.

The alternative to banning handguns is allowing handguns on college campuses. Many have argued arming the campus community would make the college campus a safer place. One must weigh the safety of the college campus with adding additional handgun crimes, accidental shootings, mishandling of handguns, and misuse of handguns. These are things students, faculty, staff, and university police do not have to normally worry about with the ban of handguns in effect. To lift the ban would be adding additional possibilities of gun related crimes.

The issue of the right to bear arms has also come up when discussing lifting the ban. All citizens of the United States are given rights afforded by the constitution. That would include the right to free speech. Students, faculty, staff, and visitors must decide which is more important. With the fact that universities are institutions of higher education, education should come first, which means academic freedom should be protected. As demonstrated, the right of free speech has already been disregarded by the allowing of handguns on campus in Utah. Free thinking and free speech should be allowed without interruption on a college campus.

For all of these reasons, the ban on handguns should remain in effect for college campuses in Texas. The safety and security of college campuses should remain the responsibility of people who are trained to handle situations, which are police officers. Allowing handguns on campus would interfere with law enforcement personnel when responding and dealing with shooter situations and risk the lives of people on campus.

No one wants to experience an active shooter situation, but if one does occur, lifting the ban on handguns could cause innocent people to be faced with trying to determine if the gun in front of them is someone trying to help them or hurt them. For these reasons, the State of Texas should continue the ban of firearms on college campuses.

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