



## CONCEAL AND CARRY OF WEAPONS

### INTRODUCTION

In past years, proponents of concealed weapons have introduced legislation mandating that the state Department of Justice shall issue permits to carry concealed weapons (CCW) – defined as handguns, electric weapons, billy clubs, or knives other than switchblades – to any applicant 21 years or older who has taken a training course, has submitted to a background check, and has not been convicted of a felony, violent misdemeanor, or drunken driving offense in the past three years.

The WCC is concerned state legislators may reintroduce similar or identical legislation this session.

### BACKGROUND

Nationally, there are four types of CCW laws. *Non-issue* prohibits everyone but law enforcement officials from carrying concealed weapons. *May issue* allows a CCW permit in certain circumstances (e.g. threats to life). *Shall issue* requires issuing a CCW permit if certain requirements are met. *No permit* means citizens can carry concealed weapons without obtaining a permit.

Currently, only Wisconsin and Illinois are *non-issue* states, prohibiting CCW altogether. Should *shall issue* legislation pass here, Wisconsin would go from having one of the most restrictive gun policies in the nation to one of the least restrictive.

### WCC POSITION

The WCC opposes CCW legislation for two principal reasons. First, the case has not been made that Wisconsin will be safer if these bills were to become law. Second, these laws would place an unreasonable burden on places of worship and other facilities opposed to the presence of weapons.

**Safety.** Supporters of CCW maintain that since the police cannot be everywhere at all times, individuals have a moral right to defend themselves and to come to the defense of others who are being threatened or attacked.

Opponents, however, point out that the absence of conceal and carry laws – just as the absence of the death penalty – has not made Wisconsin less safe. Our rate of violent crime continues to be well below the national average. Moreover, crime rates are dropping here at a greater rate than in most states with CCW laws.

Both supporters and opponents of CCW agree that if the bills were to pass, the sale of handguns in the state would increase significantly. This proliferation of guns in our state is a cause for concern, not because it will likely unleash a wave of violence, but because the greater prevalence of guns is associated with greater numbers of accidental or intentional firearm injuries and deaths among children, women, and the elderly – the three most vulnerable groups in society.

Unlike hunting rifles, which are locked away when not in use, handguns are designed to be readily accessible and easily used. An altercation in which a gun is present is more likely to end in injury or death than when a gun is not present.

Some have argued that if criminals know that bystanders and potential victims may be armed, they may think twice about committing a violent crime. While this assertion sounds plausible, there has never been any conclusive evidence to support it. In light of all these considerations, the case for repealing current law in order to promote safety has not been made.

**Churches and Other Public Buildings.** Children are often present in places of worship, hospitals, and other public facilities. Many Catholic churches share facilities and parking areas with schools. The introduction of concealed weapons in such places is highly inappropriate. The same reasons that justify banning concealed weapons from schools should apply to churches and church facilities. It is also unacceptable that, according to previous proposals, individuals would be permitted to carry concealed weapons into places of worship (and hospitals, daycare centers, safe havens for domestic violence victims, colleges and universities) unless 11 x 11 inch signs were posted at every entrance and verbal notification were given (to each and every person who enters) that concealed weapons were not permitted.

Citizens have a right to protect their own homes and their places of business and the law recognizes this. We do not think it is warranted, however, to extend this right to public spaces nor to the homes of those who wish to keep their residences weapon free.

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Urge legislators not to introduce or approve CCW legislation.

*For more information, please contact Barbara Sella at 608/257-0004.*