

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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For Immediate Release

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE SHARES CONCERNS ON CONCEAL AND CARRY LEGISLATION

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference urged legislators not to advance legislation allowing individuals to carry concealed weapons in public. The Conference made special mention of the bill's failure to explicitly exclude concealed weapons from churches.

In written testimony to the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Corrections, WCC Associate Director Barbara Sella observed that as drafted the legislation bans concealed weapons from schools and government buildings. Other facilities like churches, may exclude such weapons only if they post a sign at every entrance.

"The same reasons that justify banning concealed weapons from schools should apply equally to other places that house vulnerable populations," Sella noted. "Like schools, churches and buildings used for religious purposes, hospitals, day care centers, Catholic Charities agencies, etc., are enclosed spaces where children and adults gather in close quarters and where the intentional or accidental discharge of a firearm can do great damage."

"Furthermore, the very presence of concealed weapons would help to undercut one of the primary objectives of religious institutions, namely the fostering of peaceful relations within the family and society," she added.

Sella pointed out that more than a dozen other states that permit concealed weapons do not allow them in buildings used for religious purposes.

Beyond its impact on churches, Sella questioned whether the bill will in fact make Wisconsin safer. She pointed out that the practice of carrying concealed weapons has been illegal in Wisconsin since 1872.

"We do not believe law enforcement agencies have become less capable of protecting society and pursuing criminals than was the case when this prohibition was first enacted. Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest they are more so," she said.

"Both supporters and opponents of the bill agree that if AB 126 were to pass, the sale of handguns in our state would increase significantly. This proliferation of guns is a cause for concern, not because it will likely unleash a wave of intentional violence, but because the greater prevalence of guns is associated with greater numbers of accidental or unintentional firearm injuries and deaths."

Sella testified that if the committee did approve the bill, it should include the following changes:

- A requirement that persons who carry concealed weapons receive proper training in firearms. The bill already requires that retired law enforcement officers meet state

standards for training in firearm use. All the more should training be required of civilians.

- A requirement that exemptions be given to buildings used for religious purposes, hospitals, child care facilities, nursing homes, treatment facilities, and domestic violence service sites.

Similar provisions were included in bills passed by the Legislature but vetoed in 2003 and 2005. These provisions “remain as valid now as they were then,” Sella concluded.

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