



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

FROM: Larry Haas, Associate Director Health Care and Education

DATE: May 31, 2017

RE: SB 169, Carrying Concealed Weapons

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On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, I wish to express our opposition to Senate Bill 169. This bill eliminates certain licensure requirements for carrying a concealed weapon and alters current law prohibitions against carrying firearms in specified places, most notably school grounds.

In compliance with federal law, the bill requires individuals to be licensed to carry a concealed weapon on school grounds. While current law requires proof of completing a training program to receive a license, under this bill, if an otherwise qualified applicant does not receive training, the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) must still issue a “basic license.” For in-state purposes, a license received with training and the basic license are indistinguishable.

We oppose SB 169 for several reasons. First, if SB 169 were to pass, the amount of handguns present on schools grounds and in school zones would likely increase. This proliferation of guns is a cause for concern, not because it will likely unleash a wave of intentional violence, but because a greater prevalence of guns is associated with greater numbers of accidental or unintentional firearm injuries and deaths.

Under SB 169, individuals would be able to enter a school with a concealed weapon. While schools may post firearms restrictions on buildings and grounds, this does not prevent guns being carried in school zones. Students will not have a safe zone in which to travel to and from school. These changes may expose schools to liability, especially private schools that cannot afford armed security to inspect and ensure individuals are properly licensed. Private schools also cannot invoke sovereign immunity or take advantage of statutory limits on damages.

The same reasons that have justified banning concealed weapons from schools apply equally to other places that house vulnerable populations. 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. This is an unreasonable burden on places of worship and other institutions opposed to the presence of weapons.

Lastly, the very presence of concealed weapons undercuts one of the primary objectives of religious institutions, namely the fostering of peaceful relations within the family and society. Institutions which object on moral grounds to the presence of firearms should be recognized as gun-free zones. A number of other states that permit concealed weapons do exempt buildings used for religious purposes. Any law adopted in Wisconsin should do the same.

While we oppose these changes to Wisconsin's law on conceal and carry, we ask that if SB 169 is advanced it be amended, at a minimum, to include the following:

- To retain the requirement that persons who carry concealed weapons receive proper training in firearms.
- To expand, not narrow, the places where carrying a concealed weapon should be prohibited. Wisconsin schools should continue to be places where concealed weapons are prohibited and that exemption should be expanded to buildings used for religious purposes or that serve families, children, and other vulnerable individuals.

Thank you for considering our views on this matter.