



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Corrections

FROM: Barbara Sella, Associate Director

DATE: May 12, 2011

RE: AB 126: Carrying Concealed Weapons

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, I wish to express our opposition to Assembly Bill 126.

We oppose conceal and carry legislation for two principal reasons. First, the case has not been made that Wisconsin will be safer if AB 126 becomes law. Second, this bill would place an unreasonable burden on places of worship and other institutions opposed to the presence of weapons.

Public Safety. Carrying concealed weapons (CCW) has been illegal in our state since 1872. We do not believe law enforcement agencies have become less capable of protecting society and pursuing criminals than was the case when the current laws were enacted. Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest they are more so.

We recognize that Wisconsin is one of only two states where the practice of carrying concealed weapons is not permitted – just as we are in the minority in not employing the death penalty. Yet neither policy makes us 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 CCW states. In light of all this, the case for repealing current law has yet to be made.

Both supporters and opponents of CCW 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.

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

Exempt Locations. AB 126 would exempt schools (as federal law requires). The same reasons that justify banning concealed weapons from schools should 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.

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. 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 changing Wisconsin's ban on conceal and carry, we ask that if AB 126 is advanced it be amended, at a minimum, to include the following:

- 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 the final bill passed by the Legislature in 2003 (Senate Bill 214). They remain as valid now as they were then.

Thank you for considering our views on this matter.