



Legislative Action

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SB17-005 Not Just About Training -- Encourages Guns in Schools

Earlier this week, the Senate State, Veterans and Military Affairs passed legislation SB17-005, which outlines a relationship between school districts and county sheriffs in training teachers and other school employees for carrying guns in schools.

SB17-005 is entitled "Handgun Safety Training for School Employees," but it is about much more than just training. It is about encouraging the introduction of firearms into our schools on a routine basis. It modifies the concealed weapons law to allow school personnel who have a CCW permit, been through a county sheriff training program, and been approved by their school board, to be armed on school grounds and in the classroom. The gun carrier could be a principal, a coach, a custodian, or even a teacher.

The 2003 Concealed Weapons Law prohibits firearms on public school campuses with an exception for "a permittee who is employed or retained by contract by a school district as a school security officer." The term "school security officer" is undefined in state statute. The law was amended in 2014 to include charter schools.

At a 2014 House hearing, it was noted that some small rural school districts were dual-contracting current employees to be part-time school security officers. Concern was expressed in by a number of legislators as to this practice, although it was noted that specific contracts were drawn up with these individuals, just as they would sign contracts as coaches or club sponsors.

At that 2014 hearing, a representative from the Greeley Frontier Academy testified they were anxious to begin the same practice in hiring a non-instructional staff person who was POST-certified¹ as a school security officer. They backed off the proposal in 2016 after community outcry.

Although a small number of rural school districts are contracting to have school safety officers, they are doing this through a contract-by-contract basis, where the responsibilities of the individuals so hired are outlined. This bill eliminates the need for all that rigor by allowing individuals who meet the criteria to carry their weapons into classrooms.

Regarding training, although the sponsor Senator Chris Holbert repeatedly spoke about the need for high standards, the bill sets no standards whatsoever. It just lets the school boards and the county sheriffs figure it out. It also locks the school boards into a training relationship

with their county sheriffs as the sole providers of this training, overlooking training provided by the National Association of School Resource Officers and others.

An amendment added to the bill would require that information as to who was carrying be kept from open records retrieval, hence keeping that fact secret and creating a situation where School Resource Officers wouldn't even know which teachers or staff were armed on the campus.

The bill could also be interpreted by cash-strapped school districts to dispense with SRO's and full-time security, putting school safety emphasis on a downward spiral.

Eighteen people testified AGAINST SB17-005, while only seven testified for it. No parents came to the hearing demanding this for their children, nor did any school boards. Former senator Evie Hudak spoke in opposition to the bill for the PTA noting that "the bill would allow school districts to identify any number of people with the appropriate permit to carry a concealed gun in their schools."

Eileen McCarron of Colorado Ceasefire indicates that "in armed confrontations, trained law enforcement hit their target only 20% of the time.² In a crowded classroom, what happens to the remaining 80% of the bullets? Additionally, how do we expect a nervous far less-trained individual to perform anything but worse." She concluded "Our children are endangered by arming civilians in our classrooms."

In a statement to the Senate committee, Senator Holbert indicated that the teacher or staff member could even openly carry the firearm. McCarron, a retired school teacher commented that "this puts a whole new visual to the reading circle."

Although Senator Holbert repeatedly emphasizes the need for training, he and the House sponsor of this bill, Representative Patrick Neville, have both sponsored bills to allow any person in the state who holds a CCW permit to carry hidden handguns into our schools. Both also have sponsored permitless concealed carry bills, allowing almost anyone to legally carry hidden guns in our streets and non-school public buildings and places.

Marnie Kamensky of Colorado Ceasefire sums it up well by stating "Colorado's children need to live and learn in an environment that is safe, and gun-free."

¹POST – Peace Officer Standards and Training.

²Arm Teachers? The Facts Argue Against It. Violence Policy Center

Colorado Ceasefire, an all-volunteer statewide organization, has been fighting for freedom from gun violence since 2000. Ceasefire initiated and was instrumental in the enactment of the 2013 Colorado firearms laws, which included universal background checks, a high capacity magazine ban, and domestic violence firearms relinquishment.

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