

Testimony of Judith Heilman
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Senate Bill 143, or “Generally revise concealed weapons laws” (commonly called the Guns on Campus bill.)

Thank you for inviting me to testify about this important issue. My name is Judith Heilman, I am a mom of one, a grandmother of five, and great-grandmother of one. I’m also a volunteer with the Montana chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. We are a grassroots movement of American mothers fighting for public safety measures that respect the Second Amendment while protecting Americans from gun violence. Moms Demand Action is part of Everytown for Gun Safety, the largest gun violence prevention organization in the country with more than 2.5 million members. I am here today representing Montana Moms who oppose Senate Bill 143, or Generally revise concealed weapons laws (commonly called the Guns on Campus bill.)

This legislation would force our state’s colleges and universities to allow guns on their campuses and in their classrooms, despite the fact that university stakeholders in Montana and across the country overwhelmingly oppose guns on campus. Campus carry is opposed by 95 percent of college presidents and 94 percent of college faculty. And, not surprisingly, those who police our campuses also believe campus carry is a dangerous idea. In a recent survey of university police chiefs, a staggering 89 percent said that the most effective way to deal with gun use on campus is to prevent it altogether. A mere five percent of university police thought that allowing students to carry on campus would do anything to prevent shootings.

And students want a learning environment free from guns. Studies clearly show the vast majority of students oppose allowing concealed handguns on campus. In fact, 79 percent of students say they would feel unsafe if guns were allowed on campus.

As moms, we understand well why schools would decide that guns have no place in a college or university classroom, or anywhere on campus. We picture our own children surrounded by guns on campus—and we know what the dangers are.

Anyone who has been on a college campus knows there are a large number of risk factors that make the presence of guns very dangerous. Let’s start by looking at gun violence statistics for this age group.

College-aged students are at a higher risk for being both perpetrators and victims of gun crimes, not to mention gun suicides. In 2010, one-third of all handgun homicides in this country were committed by people ages 18 to 20. And 18-to-21 year-olds committed suicide with guns at nine times the rate as people ages 17 and under.

For many students, college life includes heavy drug and alcohol use, and everyone knows that

guns and substance abuse don't mix. A Columbia University study found that half of U.S. college students binge drink or abuse drugs.

Research also shows that alcohol is involved in 95 percent of violent crimes on campus, and contributes to most college suicides and rapes. One study found that college students who own guns also tend to drink excessively and engage in aggressive and dangerous behavior more often than other students.

Montana would be breaking ground by forcing schools to allow guns on campus—only 2 states currently force colleges to allow all concealed carry permit holders to carry guns everywhere on campus. And keep in mind what happened in Idaho when they forced schools to allow some permit-holders—those with “enhanced” permits—to carry guns in 2014. In just the second week of classes, a professor ~~with~~ shot himself in the leg when his gun accidentally went off in class.

Our campus police chiefs, college presidents, faculty, and students don't have a vote in this chamber, but as their representatives, you do.

On behalf of the Montana chapter of Moms Demand Action, I urge you to vote NO to SB 143. Thank you again for your time.

*I am a gun owner, retired detective sergeant, live in a college town, and am on the MSU campus frequently.
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