



HB 1404

January 26th, 2023

Christopher Scott, North Dakota Student Association

701-340-3380 | Christopher.m.scott@ndus.edu

Chair Porter and Members of the Committee: My name is Christopher Scott, I am current President of the North Dakota Student Association, and I am testifying in opposition of HB 1404. If passed this bill would prevent the State Board of Higher Education from prohibiting an individual authorized to conceal carry, to conceal carry on a college institution's campus.

The North Dakota Student Association was established in 1969 dedicated to ensuring that students have a voice at the table in policy that affects Higher Education. We consist of delegates from each of the 11 public institutions meeting monthly to engage students in ND Higher Education policy. Our mission is to empower students, create collaboration between the student bodies of the North Dakota public universities, and to give a student perspective on higher education policy.

In past legislative sessions, the NDSA has taken opposing stances to gun carry on campuses, including [NDSA-16-2021](#), which is a resolution against HB 1311 and any other gun carry bills during the 67th Legislative Session. According to a study conducted by John Hopkins University in 2016, 77% felt either very unsafe or somewhat unsafe, 3% said they would feel much safer, and 18% responded with slightly safer if faculty, staff, students, and visitors could carry weapons on campus. It is our belief that students must feel safe in places of learning

One of the biggest challenges college students' face is mental health. Mental health has become increasingly important on college campuses as college age groups struggle with depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide- problems that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. According to 2022 article published by the Mayo Clinic Health System, 44% of students

reported having symptoms of depression and anxiety, with another recent student finding that 1 in 3 college students experience significant depression and anxiety. The article states that young adults are increasingly faced with navigating America's culture of hyperachievement and the fear of failure. Demanding schedules, and social pressures compound, and it can be overwhelming to be a college student. Many students struggle with deteriorating mental health and may turn to suicide. According to a study conducted by the Healthy Minds Network in 2021, 13% of students have suicidal ideation, 5% have made a suicide plan, and 1% have attempted suicide.

Having guns on campus would make the means for committing suicide more easily accessible and more students may turn suicidal ideations into attempts at suicide. Immediate access to guns in one's residence has been linked to increases in suicides, thus access to firearms on campus and in residence halls could lead to increases in completed student suicides. Additionally, according to a 2020 study conducted by Stanford medicine, men who own handguns are 8 times more likely to die of gun suicides than those who don't and women who own handguns are 35 times more likely to die of gun suicides than those who don't. One of the consequences this bill may inflict is increased suicide rates across the North Dakota University System. Students may take advantage of the access to a lethal weapon in a time of hopelessness.

Additionally, allowing concealed carry on campuses would increase the potential for a school shooting or homicide to occur at a higher education institution. A study conducted by Stanford researcher John Donohue and colleagues found that states that have passed right to carry laws experience a 13 to 15 percent increase in aggregate violent crime rates, over a period of 10 years than states that did not. A 2017 report by the FBI, for every time a gun was used in self-defense, there were 35 reports of criminal gun homicides, totaling 10,380 criminal gun homicides for the year, and 298 that were justified, concluding that guns are rarely used for self-defense but are much more likely to be used for acts of violence against others.

The increased danger to individuals in the NDUS and on institutional campuses posed by HB 1404 is an egregious attack on campus safety. The legislature should not require institutions to allow firearms on campuses without the input of students, faculty, staff, administration, security, and other institutional stakeholders on an institutional case-by-case basis. On behalf of the North Dakota Student Association, and the NDUS students across the state, I urge a DO NOT PASS recommendation on HB 1404.

[Handgun ownership associated with much higher suicide risk | News Center | Stanford Medicine](#)

[Self-Defense Gun Use | Violence Policy Center \(vpc.org\)](#)

[Concealed carry doesn't guarantee our safety — it puts us at greater risk – Chicago Tribune](#)

[College students and depression - Mayo Clinic Health System](#)

[College students with suicidal and self-injurious behavior U.S. 2021 | Statista](#)