Admiral William McRaven (Ret.)
Chancellor
The University of Texas System
210 West 6th Street, Suite 2.100
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Chancellor McRaven:

As a member of the Texas House of Representatives serving on the Committee on Higher Education, I am writing to pose several questions with respect to legislation which would provide for the possession of firearms on the campuses of public colleges and universities in Texas.

House Bill 937 and Senate Bill 11 would require all public universities to allow those with a concealed handgun license to bring their weapons onto college campuses, regardless of the support or opposition of regents, administrators, law enforcement professionals, faculty members or student bodies.

If the Legislature were to finally pass this legislation, is there a need for further provisions, not currently included in the measures, to enhance safety on our campuses and protect the safety of the public?

Taking into account Governor Abbott's call to elevate our universities' national research standings, an integral component of this effort is the recruitment of highly-qualified faculty from around the world. With multiple institutions in the University of Texas System vying to achieve Tier One status as Emerging Research Universities, it has been suggested that potential top faculty candidates -- including Nobel Laureates and National Academy members who generate millions of dollars in research funding -- may be reluctant to work at Texas universities if campus carry passes. How do you think this legislation would impact the competitiveness of our institutions, specifically in recruiting and retaining the best and brightest faculty?

Additionally, according to news reports, it is projected that campus carry could cost the UT System more than $39 million in costs associated with the implementation of the legislation.

Chris.Turner@house.state.tx.us
Costs would be incurred for gun lockers, judgment and de-escalation training for staff and campus security, and additional administrative personnel. At a time when our universities are stretching limited dollars to improve academic programs and student services, spending tens of millions of dollars to implement campus carry legislation does not seem like the best use of our state's limited resources. How will universities cope with these added costs and what funds will be used to pay these unbudgeted expenses?

Thank you for your service to our state and for your attention to this matter; I look forward to your thoughts on the questions I have posed related to campus carry legislation. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or if I can be of any assistance to you or the UT System.

Sincerely,

Chris Turner
April 20, 2015

The Honorable Chris Turner
State Representative
Post Office Box 2910
Austin, Texas  78768-02910

Dear Representative Turner:

Thank you for your letter of April 6 concerning the possession of concealed handguns on the campuses of public institutions of higher education, particularly in relation to proposed H.B. No. 937 and S.B. No. 11.

You first ask if additional provisions could be added to the bills that would enhance the safety of the campuses and the public. I believe several reasonable provisions could be included that would do so, by allowing an institution to do the following:

- Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun in areas where institutional policies prohibit institutional police officers from possessing a handgun.
- Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun on premises in which security personnel conduct an electronic screening for weapons of each person entering the premises.
- Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun in areas with select agents and other biosafety hazards, including Galveston National Laboratory and laboratories with a BSL Level 2 or 3 designation.
- Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun on premises where the terms of a federal license, research grant, or contract dictate a prohibition on handguns for licenses, grants, or contracts of that type.
- Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun on premises in which people are in high-stress or emotionally charged circumstances, including mental health or crisis counseling centers, and including areas where rights or privileges of a student, employee, or faculty member are being adjudicated (such as an expulsion or termination).
- Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun on the premises of clinics providing health services, including student health clinics, similar to the existing prohibition related to hospitals and for the same reason possession may be prohibited in a hospital.
- Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun on premises within or connected to a hospital but that are difficult to distinguish from the space used to provide direct health care services, such as areas used for instruction, academic support, or student services.
• Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun on that portion of premises in which, because of proximity to a magnetic resonance imaging device (MRI), the presence of any metal object is restricted because of the danger presented by the ability of an MRI to powerfully attract even large metal objects.
• Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun on premises used to provide health care services to adults or juveniles confined in a correctional facility.
• Prohibit the possession of a concealed handgun on the premises of an on-campus child day-care operation, which seem logically indistinguishable from a “preschool,” premises where the current bills permit the exclusion of concealed handguns.

You also ask my opinion as to the potential effect of the legislation on our competitiveness in recruiting and retaining faculty. I am not aware of any formal study on this issue, but the intuitive answer is that the presence of concealed weapons will make us less competitive. Published reports of campus surveys suggest that a large majority of faculty oppose the presence of concealed handguns. If correct, it is reasonable to conclude that those faculty members would be more likely to accept an offer of employment on a campus that did not permit the possession of concealed handguns. And the presence of handguns on Texas campuses, where we would be one of fewer than ten states to allow this conduct, may well cause faculty to be discouraged from relocating from other states.

Finally, you ask about the source of revenue from which campuses will pay the costs associated with implementing the legislation. As you know, operational expenses for an institution of higher education are paid from two primary sources—state appropriations and tuition. In addressing these costs, our campuses will either need increased revenue or be compelled to reduce or discontinue other services or activities and redirect that revenue. How each individual campus would address the matter is as yet undetermined.

Sincerely,

Bill McRaven
Chancellor

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Thanks for your interest in this important issue!