



**CEASEFIRE** oregon

*Building safe and healthy communities free from gun violence*

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## **Oregon should ban guns on public college campuses**

A long-standing ban on guns on Oregon public college campuses was overturned by the Oregon Court of Appeals on September 28. The court held that the Oregon State Board of Higher Education lacked the necessary legal authority to regulate firearms on Oregon college campuses. The court's decision was on a narrow and technical legal issue, but it left more than 90,000 students suddenly vulnerable to an influx of firearms on campus.

Guns on college campuses pose a significant risk to college students. Research shows that gun-owning college students are more likely than other students to engage in risky behavior (including binge drinking), use cocaine or crack, be arrested for a DUI, vandalize property, and get in trouble with police.<sup>1</sup> Rather than offering a measure of protection, gun ownership among students is associated with behaviors that are likely to put the owners and others at risk for injury. A drunken college party is a risky place; a drunken college party with a loaded gun is much more dangerous.

Suicide is another major risk that guns pose to college students. Over 1,000 college students commit suicide each year, and an additional 24,000 attempts are made.<sup>2</sup> Last spring, the University of Oregon's Daily Emerald reported that 55 percent of college students consider committing suicide. ("Learning to Cope," Oregon Daily Emerald, April 22, 2011.)

Restricting access to lethal means significantly reduces the risk of impulsive suicide.<sup>3</sup> Nine out of ten people who survive a suicide attempt will not die by suicide later in life.<sup>4</sup> But if a gun is used in a suicide attempt, more than 90 percent of the time it is fatal, compared with a 3 percent fatality rate for suicide attempts by drug overdose.<sup>5</sup> Some campus gun owners may be well-trained and responsible, but a friend or roommate's gun can be as lethal as one's own. Keeping guns off campus gives students time to reconsider.

Personal weapons do not provide meaningful protection against the horrific school shootings that have grabbed headlines in recent years. Reacting under the extreme stress of a school shooting, the civilian shooter poses a grave threat to students and staff, who can be caught in the crossfire. Even trained police officers, on average, hit their intended targets less than 20 percent of the time.<sup>6</sup> In a survey of over 400 campus police chiefs, 86 percent of them disagreed or strongly disagreed that "allowing students to carry concealed weapons on campus would prevent some or all campus killings."<sup>7</sup> That opinion is shared by Colin Goddard, a student survivor of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, who experienced firsthand the chaos of a campus shooting.<sup>8</sup>

Gov. John Kitzhaber and the Oregon Legislature need to act immediately to ban guns in Oregon public schools. Guns on campuses pose an elevated and unacceptable risk to students and staff at all educational levels.

## Footnotes

1. Miller, Matthew, David Hemenway, and Henry Wechsler, "Guns and Gun Threats at College," *Journal of American College Health* 51(57) (September 2002):62–64; Miller, et al., "Guns at College," *Journal of American College Health* 48(7) (1999).
2. Cintron, Miriam, "College Campuses Grapple with Escalating Suicide Rates," Nearwestgazette.com (on file with Brady Center).
3. Lewiecki, E. Michael and Miller, Sara A., "Time to Reconsider," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 305 (11) (March 16, 2011).
4. Owens D, Horrocks J, and House A. "Fatal and non-fatal repetition of self-harm: systematic review," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 2002; 181:193–199, at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/index.html#Owens>.
5. Miller, Matthew, et al., "Household Firearm Ownership and Rates of Suicide Across the 50 United States," *Journal of Trauma* (April 2007):1029.
6. Morrison, Gregory B., "Deadly Force Programs Among Larger U.S. Police Departments," *Police Quarterly* 9 (2006):331–332.
7. Thompson, Amy, James H. Price, Adam Mrdjenovich, Jagdish Khubchandani, "Reducing Firearm-Related Violence on College Campuses—Police Chiefs' Perceptions and Practices," *Journal of American College Health* 58(3) 2009:247–254.
8. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_KDW4g\\_MvMo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KDW4g_MvMo).