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House Bill 1588
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
February 6, 2025

Chairman Porter and Members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Katherine Kempel, and I serve as the Governmental Affairs Commissioner for the University of North Dakota (UND) Student Government. I am submitting testimony in opposition to HB 1588 as it relates to the possession of a firearm or dangerous weapon at a public gathering.

As proposed, the amendments listed in Section 4 of this bill would allow individuals to possess firearms or dangerous weapons in publicly owned or operated buildings. In your assessment of this bill, please consider the impact this would have on North Dakota's institutions of higher education, including the University of North Dakota. All buildings owned by UND are considered public property and would be affected by this amendment, allowing individuals to bring firearms and dangerous weapons into university-owned buildings such as residence halls, academic buildings, dining halls, and recreational facilities.

UND's current policy regarding firearms and dangerous weapons in campus buildings reflects State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) policy which states that "Except as provided by law, firearms and dangerous weapons are prohibited from campus buildings owned or operated by the SBHE, including the eleven institutions."¹ HB 1588 directly opposes this policy that is in place to ensure the safety of students, staff, faculty, and the public.

Prior to the current legislative session, UND's Student Government, which is made up of elected student representatives from across campus, unanimously passed Senate Resolution 2425-05 outlining the legislative priorities of UND's Student Government. Campus safety was included as one of UND Student Government's priorities for this legislative session. This bill

¹ <https://und.policystat.com/policy/17207934/latest/#autoid-a59d3>

does not increase safety on campuses; instead, it stands to decrease both real and perceived campus safety.² Students living, working, and studying on campus deserve to have a reasonable expectation that those around them are not carrying firearms or dangerous weapons.

Under this amendment, students would be able to possess firearms and dangerous weapons in on-campus student residence halls. This would be a change from UND's current policy, which instead allows students to store weapons in a 24-hour accessible gun locker facilitated by the University Police Department. This current policy allows for easy access to personal firearms and dangerous weapons without allowing students to store these items in student residence halls where the safe storage of these items cannot be guaranteed. This policy has not been opposed by students.

For many students, college is a time of increased stress and potential mental health issues. With increased access to firearms and dangerous weapons, the risk of students potentially harming themselves or others is also increased.³ UND's community values statement specifies that everyone be allowed to work, learn, and live in a safe, caring environment. Out of concern for the safety of students, staff, faculty, and the public when in university-owned buildings, firearms and dangerous weapons should continue to be prohibited in university-owned public buildings.

Chairman Porter and members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I respectfully request a **Do Not Pass** recommendation on HB 1588 as currently written. If this bill were to be amended to exclude institutions of higher education and their events on property owned or leased by the institutions, I would take a neutral stance on this bill. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Katherine Kempel

² <https://news.gallup.com/poll/611459/students-prefer-colleges-restrict-guns-campus.aspx>

³ <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2016/allowing-guns-on-college-campuses-unlikely-to-reduce-mass-shootings>