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In the wake of several campus shootings, the most deadly being the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech University, states are considering legislation about whether or not to permit guns on college campuses. For some, these events point to a need to ease existing firearm regulations and allow concealed weapons on campuses. Others see the solution in tightening restrictions to keep guns off campuses.

In 2012, 16 states introduced legislation to allow concealed carry on campus in some regard - all failed to pass. In 2011 two bills passed, one in Mississippi and one in Wisconsin. The Mississippi legislation creates an exception to allow those who have taken a voluntary course on safe handling and use of firearms by a certified instructor to carry on campuses. The Wisconsin legislation creates a provision that colleges and universities must allow concealed carry on campus grounds, however, campuses can prohibit weapons from campus buildings if signs are posted at every entrance explicitly stating that weapons are prohibited.

On the other hand, recent shootings also have encouraged some legislators to strengthen existing firearm regulations. In 2012, 3 states introduced legislation to prohibit concealed carry weapons on campus. None of these bills passed.

Contact Michelle Liu for updates to legislation introduced in the 2013 session.

Concealed Carry Weapon Laws & College Campuses

In the United States, 49 out of 50 states have concealed carry weapons laws. Currently, there are 22 states that ban carrying a concealed weapon on a college campus: Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming.

In 23 states the decision to ban or allow concealed carry weapons on campuses is made by each college or university individually: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Due to recent state legislation and court rulings, 5 states now have provisions allowing the carrying of concealed weapons on public postsecondary campuses. These states are Colorado, Mississippi, Oregon, Utah, and Wisconsin.
Utah remains the only state to have statute specifically naming public colleges and universities as public entities that do not have the authority to ban concealed carry, and thus, all 10 public institutions in Utah allow concealed weapons on their property. Recently passed Wisconsin legislation creates a provision that colleges and universities must allow concealed carry on campus grounds, however, campuses can prohibit weapons from campus buildings if signs are posted at every entrance explicitly stating that weapons are prohibited. All University of Wisconsin system campuses and technical community college districts are said to be putting this signage in place. Legislation passed in Mississippi in 2011 creates an exception to allow concealed carry on college campuses for those who have taken a voluntary course on safe handling and use of firearms by a certified instructor.

Recent court cases have also overturned some long standing system wide bans of concealed carry on state college and university campuses. In March 2012, the Colorado Supreme Court ruled that the University of Colorado’s policy banning guns from campus violates the state’s concealed carry law, and in 2011 the Oregon Court of Appeals overturned the Oregon University System’s ban of guns on campuses, allowing those with permits to carry concealed guns on the grounds of these public colleges (Oregon’s State Board of Higher Education retained its authority to have internal policies for certain areas of campus, and adopted a new policy in 2012 that bans guns in campus buildings). In both cases, it was ruled that state law dictates only the legislature can regulate the use, sale and possession of firearms, and therefore these systems had overstepped their authority in issuing the bans. See the "Guns on Campus: Campus Action," page for more information on these rulings, board policies and other campuses that allow concealed carry on their grounds.

www.ncsl.org/issues-research/edu/guns-on-campus-overview.aspx

For up-to-date information on legislation, see the Education Bill Tracking Database. Search under the topic "Postsecondary - Campus Safety."