

11 February 2018

I have been a faculty member at the University of Kansas for over 30 years, and I am writing as a private citizen to express my fervent opposition to HB 2042. For nearly three decades, I have enjoyed working at a beautiful and safe campus, without feeling the dangers and fears that have emerged with campus carry. HB 2042 will actually and effectively intensify the danger by reducing the age limit from 21 to allow 18-20 year olds to carry guns. Should this law be passed, anyone over 18 with a permit from Kansas (which is easy to obtain and requires almost no practical training) or a permit from another state (which may or may not require any training) will be allowed to carry on campus.

As a faculty member and department administrator, I have taught, advised, and mentored hundreds upon hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students, and am deeply and intimately familiar with the academic and personal challenges experienced by late adolescents and young adults from the ages of around 18 to around 35. Furthermore, I am deeply and intimately familiar with the variety of settings and circumstances that bring people together on campus.

Late adolescents between the ages of 18 to 20 are among the least experienced and most volatile members of the campus community. Undergraduate students are typically away from home and parental supervision for the first time in their lives, and they have not yet reached adulthood physiologically, cognitively, socially, or emotionally. In the new environment of a university campus, they encounter people, ideas, and experiences for the first time, and they are often confused as they try to understand different customs, beliefs, cultures, frameworks, behaviors, and values. Beyond these challenges, undergraduates are also exposed to substances and substance abuse; for many, this is the first time they have ever had ready access to drugs and alcohol and to unsupervised occasions in which many of their peers are indulging and over-indulging. Undergraduates have to deal with the risk of unwanted sexual advances and sexual assaults. Adults should provide support to late adolescents and young adults so that they can develop the skills they need to cope with new, confusing, and often threatening aspects of society. Some of these crucial skills involve logical and critical thinking, broad knowledge, familiarity with different value systems and perspectives, etc. Carrying guns on campus suggests that it is necessary to defend oneself against difference rather than to learn about it. The narrow world of 18-20 year olds should be allowed to expand through encounters with difference framed as opportunities not as threats.

I urge you to exercise your responsibility as an adult by voting against HB2042.

Sincerely yours,

Cheryl Lester
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