



DAVID CRAIG

STATE SENATOR

Senate Committee on Insurance, Financial Services, Government Oversight and Courts
Public Hearing, February 20, 2020
Senate Bill 822
Senator David Craig, 28th Senate District

Vice-Chairman Stroebel and Committee Members:

Thank you for taking testimony on Senate Bill 822 relating to possession of a firearm in a place of worship by a person who has a license to carry a concealed weapon.

Given the recent tragedies involving evil-doers specifically targeting of places of worship, we have introduced legislation to affirmatively allow concealed carry permit holders to protect themselves and others in places of worship. Indiana and Texas recently changed their laws to specifically allow for parishioners to carry in places of worship, and with events surrounding the Texas church shooting and the incredible, life-saving response from an armed citizen, it is an important reminder that these types of meaningful reforms lead to positive outcomes.

With the diverse array of faiths, methods, and places of worship, the legislation would apply to all places of worship including those within a school zone. Under current state law, worshippers in places of worship within a school zone are prohibited from exercising the right to protect themselves that other worshippers have. This bill would allow worshippers to decide how best to protect themselves from those who intend to do them harm – in keeping with their constitutional right of free exercise.

Additionally, this bill preserves the private property rights of places of worship by allowing owners to post signs prohibiting carry should they choose to do so. Government should not stand in the way of a private property owner deciding how to use their property. This bill gives the private property owner, not the government, the final choice on this important matter of safety and freedom to worship without fear.

I will close with an excerpt from the Racine Journal Times editorial board in their Opinion Article titled "Taking steps for safety in our houses of worship". In their opinion they say, "We want to believe that, as Americans exercising our freedom of religion, we would be safe in our houses of worship, no matter the religion. Sadly, in recent years we have learned that, no matter your religion, that safety is not assured." They continue... "We encourage local parishes and congregations to explore and implement ways to keep their fellow worshippers safe." This legislation before the committee would do just that – allow for places of worship to have thoughtful discussions around implementation of a safety option which the government currently prevents them from taking.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of my testimony.



Thursday, February 20, 2020

Speaking In Favor of SB 822

Daniel Reehoff, Founder and Lead Pastor

DaySpring Church & Schools. N14W29489 Silvernail Road, Pewaukee, WI 53072

Brief History: DaySpring Church was founded as an organic church plant in 2009 by Daniel Reehoff. In the past 10 years the church has grown to acquire 36 acres in Town of Delafield on I94. The church recently completed construction of a 33,000 square foot facility. The church has over 500 in weekly attendance, and the school has nearly 200 in enrollment this past year.

Discussion Points:

- DaySpring Church has easy access and exposure to I94. Three million cars per month pass in front of the church property.
- We have a locked door secure facility, with security cameras in every room operating 24/7/365.
- We are in an affluent, conservative, "safe" area of Town of Delafield. Parents enroll their children in our school because of the large outdoors and safe campus. The parishioners come to worship because of the ease of access. The community finds help on Fridays as we run one of the largest faith-based addiction recovery weekly meetings in SE WI.
- Even with security measures, the perpetrators of recent vandalism and theft at our property have been able to leave the scene and blend in with traffic, leaving local and state police with a near impossible job of tracking them.
- It is essential that we have a volunteer security team to help keep parishioners and staff safe. DaySpring currently contracts volunteer security team.
- It would be beneficial if WI laws were in sync with Federal laws on this issue: This would eliminate the expense and hassle if someone challenged our right to have people with concealed weapons on premises. Especially if someone wanted to challenge our "volunteer contract". This shouldn't be necessary.
- I encourage our law makers to bring WI's law into conformity with the federal law and let us protect our people, our premises and our possessions without the potential for having to spend time and money to defend our right to carry. If businesses in WI can determine whether they want to allow carry, why shouldn't private churches, even those with schools—and those private schools should definitely have the right to make that decision, just like the businesses do.

Pastor Daniel Reehoff

N14W29489 Silvernail Rd. • Pewaukee, WI 53072

262-404-5092 • info@dayspringbaptist.com • www.mydayspringchurch.com

*"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves:
it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."*



**WISCONSIN COUNCIL
OF CHURCHES**
COURAGE. JUSTICE. HOLY IMAGINATION.

30 W. Mifflin St, Ste 602
Madison, WI 53711
608-837-3108
wichurches.org

DATE: Thursday, February 20, 2020
TO: Senate Committee on Insurance, Financial Services, Government Oversight and Courts
FROM: Peter Bakken, Justice and Witness Coordinator, Wisconsin Council of Churches
RE: Senate Bill 822, Concealed Weapons in Places of Worship

I write on behalf of the Wisconsin Council of Churches to express our opposition to Senate Bill 822.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC) is a network of Christian churches and faith-based organizations committed to working together across our many differences. The Council connects 20 Christian traditions, which have approximately 2,000 congregations and over one million church members in Wisconsin.

Senate Bill 822 would allow a person who has a license to carry a concealed weapon to bring a firearm into a place of worship, even if that place of worship is located on school grounds. We appreciate the sponsors' concerns for the safety of our parishioners, but we cannot agree with this approach.

Fundamental to our opposition is the conviction that our places of worship must be true sanctuaries: places of peace, reconciliation, and hospitality. As followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, our churches witness to the faith that the solution to violence is not the threat of more violence. Our congregations live out their belief that there are more loving, creative and intelligent ways to seek safety and security.

Simply having more firearms on a church or school's premises increases the risk of accidental or unintentional shootings. Even highly-trained individuals can make tragic errors of judgement in chaotic or ambiguous situations; how much more may persons who have not been rigorously trained on how to respond in active shooter situations. For many congregants, the knowledge that someone in the next pew is armed will not make them feel safer, or increase their confidence that they are enfolded in a gracious community of love and acceptance.

Even though, under this legislation, churches on school property could choose to post signs prohibiting firearms in their buildings or on their grounds, those very signs undermine that sense of sanctuary and environment of peace. Moreover, deciding whether or not to post signs can be a divisive issue in many congregations. A church or school that posts firearm restrictions could be exposed to liability if there were to be an act of violence on its property; one that did not could be exposed to liability if it was unable to ensure that everyone bringing a weapon on to the premises was properly licensed.

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The Wisconsin Council of Churches has just released a new study-action guide *Who is My Neighbor? Multigenerational Conversations on Faith & Gun Violence*, which can be downloaded from our website. It includes a section on “Church Security and Safer Church Resources,” which recommends alternatives to armed guards and concealed weapons, such as incorporating intruder/active shooter preparation into church emergency plans, consulting with local law enforcement, and RUN, HIDE, FIGHT as best practice for responding to a violent incident. These approaches strike a faithful balance between hospitality and peacefulness on the one hand, and intelligent watchfulness and preparation on the other.

We believe that such measures are more effective in reducing harm and more in keeping with the faith of our churches than is the approach taken in SB 822. In spite of its stated intent, this legislation will not enhance the safety or security of our churches, and it will undermine our churches’ witness to and pursuit of “the things that make for peace.” (Romans 14:19)

We appreciate this opportunity to express our concerns.

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION
11250 WAPLES MILL ROAD
FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA 22030



NRA

February 20, 2020

Senate Committee on Insurance, Financial Services, Government Oversight and Courts

Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the National Rifle Association and its members in Wisconsin, I write to express our strong support for Senate Bill 822. SB 822 would allow an individual with a valid concealed carry weapon license to carry in a church, synagogue, or other building used as a place of worship that share the grounds or buildings of a public or private school unless the building or grounds of the place of worship are posted by the land owner to prohibit the carrying of concealed firearms.

This bill is about enhancing safety at churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions as well as the right of self-defense for those who attend functions in such facilities. Unfortunately, religious institutions are not crime free zones as recent events have exposed the vulnerability of our faith-based communities. Currently, religious institutions are being prevented from making safety and security decisions due to current law when a school is associated with the property. This diminishes the ability of religious institutions to provide security teams and prevents congregants who are licensed to carry concealed weapons to protect themselves and their families. These are the very same rights that private citizens, businesses and other private organizations have on their property.

This bill amends the law to make it clear that churches and other places of worship have the right to make decisions about the safety and protection of members and guests on properties for which they are responsible.

For these reasons, and several others, the NRA urges support for the passage of SB 822 as it is currently written.

Respectfully,

Scott Jones
Wisconsin State Director
NRA-ILA



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senate Committee on Insurance, Financial Services, Government Oversight and Courts
FROM: Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director *Kim Vercauteren*
DATE: February 20, 2020
RE: SB 822, Concealed Weapons in Places of Worship

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), I wish to express our opposition to Senate Bill 822. This bill allows a person who has a concealed carry license to bring a firearm into a place of worship, even if that place of worship is located on school grounds.

While the WCC acknowledges that a house of worship retains the option to post restrictions on the carrying of firearms on its ground or in its buildings, we oppose SB 822 for several reasons. First, if SB 822 were to pass, the number of handguns present on school grounds and in school zones would likely increase. This proliferation of guns is a cause for concern, not because it will likely unleash a wave of intentional violence, but because a greater prevalence of guns is associated with greater numbers of accidental or unintentional firearm injuries and deaths.

Under SB 822, individuals would be able to enter school grounds, including a worship facility, with a concealed weapon. While a school near a church may post firearms restrictions on buildings and grounds, this does not prevent guns from being carried in unposted areas that may include shared common areas such as parking lots, community rooms, and entrances. Additionally, SB 822 does not restrict carrying to times when a worship site is in use and may include instances when both a school and worship site are open, and in some instances, connected.

Currently, a concealed carry licensee may not possess a firearm in or on the grounds of a school unless some other exception applies. However, there are several exceptions, including concealed carry by current and former law enforcement. Federal and state law also permits concealed carry by an individual for use in a program approved by a school or by individuals under contract with a school to do so. In other words, if a school and worship site want to use current or former law enforcement, design a safety program with volunteers, or even hire security, all of these are permissible under current law.

Changing the current standard may expose churches and schools to liability, especially churches and private schools that cannot afford to inspect and ensure that all individuals carrying weapons onsite are properly licensed. These private entities also cannot invoke sovereign immunity or take advantage of statutory limits on damages should some incident occur.

(over)

The same reasons that have justified banning concealed weapons from schools apply equally to other places that house vulnerable populations. Like schools, churches and buildings used for religious purposes, hospitals, day care centers, Catholic Charities agencies, etc., are enclosed spaces where children and adults gather in close quarters and where the intentional or accidental discharge of a firearm can do great damage. As in the past, we ask that the state not place an unreasonable burden on places of worship and other institutions opposed to the presence of weapons.

Lastly, the very presence of concealed weapons undercuts one of the primary objectives of religious institutions, namely the fostering of peaceful relations within the family and society. Institutions which object on moral grounds to the presence of firearms should be recognized as gun-free zones. Several other states that permit concealed weapons do exempt buildings used for religious purposes. Any law adopted in Wisconsin should do the same.

We urge you to oppose SB 822. Thank you.

Gibbs, Adam

From: Dwayne Morris <Dwayne.Morris@mbu.edu>
Sent: Thursday, February 20, 2020 11:10 AM
To: Sen.Craig; Gibbs, Adam
Subject: In Support of SB 822

Honorable Senator Craig,

I write to express my support for SB 822. This action is both reasonable and enhances the safety of the people of Wisconsin.

As has been pointed out elsewhere, anything can become a weapon: a stick, a can, the sharp edge of some material. Our state recognizes this and has responded appropriately with legislation allowing firearms for self-defense. For this we are grateful.

The concept of concealed carry recognizes that some public situations include inherent dangers warranting appropriate readiness for defense for the vulnerable. It is no small news to hear that houses of worship throughout the US have been targeted by some individuals with nefarious intentions. The recent occurrences in Texas and elsewhere remind us all of this sad fact.

Yet many houses of worship stand in danger of attack due to the fact that their facilities function dually as sanctuaries and as schools. Legislation outlawing firearms at schools unduly makes some of our citizens vulnerable, defenseless, and helpless in the face of such attacks; we have witnessed this in the news, and no doubt we all agree that it is tragic and senseless.

SB 822 rectifies an unintended wrong. It maintains that a house of worship be recognized as such regardless of its dual use. Stated times of public worship may now accommodate concealed carry if they so choose. This action is both reasonable and enhances the safety of the people of Wisconsin.

The right of self-defense is serious and not to be treated lightly by any person or any legislative body. Safety is important because people are valuable. I urge you to pass SB 822 and thereby enhance the protection of many peace-loving citizens who seek to worship in harmony and good-will. Let not the vulnerable become victims of an unintended oversight in current law.

Respectfully,

Dwayne Morris
Associate Pastor for Youth and Family Ministries
Calvary Baptist Church, Watertown, WI