



TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony on Senate Bill 584: Possession of a Firearm in a Place of Worship

Thank you members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety for allowing me to speak on this important bill today and how it will benefit and protect the citizens of Wisconsin.

SB 584 gives places of worship that have a school attached to them the option to allow conceal carry license holders the ability to carry inside if they decide to. A place of worship could still decide that they do not wish to allow concealed weapons inside the building.

This bill is important to many people around the state and provides some peace of mind for those who may fear persecution for their faith. Self-defense is a God given right and there is nothing more selfless than being brave and defending helpless people around us.

An example of where this has saved many lives can be found in the story of Jack Wilson. In December of 2019 at West Freeway Church of Christ in Texas, a man opened fire killing church members before a church member pulled out his weapon and shot back at the gunman stopping him from injuring more people.

With rising crime rates all across the country, we have seen gun sales go through the roof with many of them being first time buyers.

According to Small Arms Analytics, in 2020 nearly 23 million guns were purchased. This is a huge surge when compared to 2019 when only 13.9 million were purchased. The National Shooting Sports Foundation estimates that last summer alone 40% of new gun buyers were women and that the largest demographic of buyers were African Americans. These statistics show that the American populace is embracing their second amendment right and should be able to protect themselves and others should a tragedy arise.

SB 584 protects Wisconsinites in a religious setting if there is ever an emergency that requires self-defense. As we have seen numerous times in many different places of worship, a gun owner can often make a huge difference in the outcome of atrocities.

Again, I appreciate your time and consideration of this important legislation.



WISCONSIN FAMILY ACTION
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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 584
SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND PUBLIC SAFETY
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2021
JULIAINE K. APPLING, PRESIDENT

Thank you, Chairman Wanggaard and committee members, for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 584. Wisconsin Family Action supports this bill.

Senate Bill 584 would essentially bring Wisconsin law into ^{closer} conformity with the federal law regarding whether individuals can carry a concealed weapon into a church that has a school. Wisconsin's current law prohibits concealed carry on any school's premises and extends even to prohibiting concealed carry in a church that has a school when school is not in session.

Churches with related schools should not be treated any differently from churches without schools, which under Wisconsin law have the option of whether or not they allow concealed carry. The fact that a church has a school should not put that church in a separate category. In a sense, the way this law works in our state, the school becomes the controlling entity, not the church.

However, the vast majority of churches with related schools operate just the opposite, with the church being the controlling entity and the school being a ministry or mission of the church, under the legal and corporate structure of the church. I say that because common sense would make one think that this would mean the controlling law would be that which is applicable to the church more than the school. However, I suspect this concealed carry issue is just one area where we might have some laws that invert that.

Most churches in Wisconsin are incorporated here as not-for-profit organizations, including those with schools, which makes them legitimate private "businesses," if you will. Wisconsin law allows private businesses to determine for themselves whether they will permit concealed carry on their premises. Churches with religious schools should have that same option. Frankly, we believe any private school should have the option to allow or disallow concealed carry. The bill proposed last session provided for that.

That said, this bill does appropriately address the issue of allowing churches with schools the freedom to choose for themselves whether they will permit concealed carry—and that is exactly as it should be. SB 584 has enough safeguards built in that I would assume those who had misgivings about the bill proposed last session, would be good with this more restrictive proposal.

As we know, our churches have become targets for individuals meaning to do harm to many people at once. Church staff and individuals attending those places should have the right to defend their people, their property and their possessions without fear of breaking the law.

Thank you to Senator Roth and Representative Pronschinske for bringing this bill forward. We urge this committee to support this bill and move it quickly to the full Senate for a vote.



**WISCONSIN COUNCIL
OF CHURCHES**

COURAGE. JUSTICE. HOLY IMAGINATION.

30 W. Mifflin St., Ste 602
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608-837-3108
www.wichurches.org

DATE: Thursday, October 14, 2021
TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
FROM: Peter Bakken, Justice and Witness Coordinator, Wisconsin Council of Churches
RE: Senate Bill 584, Possession of a firearm by a licensee in a place of worship located on the grounds of a private school

I write on behalf of the Wisconsin Council of Churches to express our opposition to Senate Bill 584.

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 21 Christian traditions, which have approximately 2,000 congregations and over one million church members in Wisconsin.

Senate Bill 584 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 congregation 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 likely would it be for terrible mistakes to be made by persons who have not been rigorously trained on how to respond in active shooter situations? The fact that other legislation is even now being proposed to eliminate the licensing requirement raises a very real possibility that even that minimal safeguard in SB 584 would fall by the wayside. 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.

Requiring a written policy allowing a licensee to possess a firearm raises its own problems for a congregation that chooses to do so. Deciding whether to adopt such a policy could be very divisive, both within the congregation and between the congregation and the parents of children attending the school, who may feel that their very real concerns for their children's safety are not being addressed.

A congregation would bear the responsibility for making sure that their policy was clearly and comprehensively communicated and enforced. Not only would that undermine the sense of being in a place of sanctuary and peace, but the congregation could be exposed to liability if it was unable to ensure that everyone bringing a weapon on to the premises was properly licensed and following the policy.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches has a study-action guide *Who is My Neighbor? Multigenerational Conversations on Faith & Gun Violence*, which can be downloaded from our website.¹ 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 584. 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.

¹ <https://www.wichurches.org/2020/02/19/study-guide-faith-gun-violence/>



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

FROM: Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director *Kim Vercauteren*

DATE: October 14, 2021

RE: SB 584, Concealed Firearms in Places of Worship on Private School Grounds

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), I wish to express our opposition to Senate Bill 584. This bill allows a person who has a concealed carry license to bring a firearm into a place of worship located on school grounds, so long as the place of worship has a policy permitting the concealed carry of firearms.

Before identifying the concerns that we have with SB 584, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the bill's authors in addressing past concerns raised by faith-based advocates and thank them for responding to those concerns by requiring worship spaces to opt to allow the concealed carrying of firearms, rather than making concealed carry permissive by default.

While the WCC acknowledges and is grateful for the improvements incorporated into this proposal, we oppose SB 584 for several reasons. First, if SB 584 were to pass, the number of handguns present on school grounds and in school zones would likely increase. As a greater prevalence of guns is associated with greater numbers of accidental or unintentional firearm injuries and deaths, it is imperative that great care be exercised to mitigate the presence of firearms where vulnerable, impressionable children are present.

Under SB 584, individuals would be permitted to enter school grounds with a concealed firearm in accord with a worship facility's policy for the purpose of attending a worship service or religious ceremony, or to work or volunteer at the place of worship. This could apply when both a school and worship site are open, and in some instances, connected. While a school near a church may post firearms restrictions on buildings and grounds, this bill would allow concealed guns to be carried in unposted areas that may include shared common areas such as parking lots, community rooms, and entrances.

There is also a presumption under SB 584 that a place of worship located on school grounds is owned and operated by the same governing body that operates the school, though this is not always the case, especially when a church has opted to lease a vacant school building to an unaffiliated private school. School authorities would not necessarily know that a worship site located on their grounds permits concealed carry, as there is no notice requirement under the bill

that requires church authorities to notify the school's governing body of the concealed carry policy.

The very presence of concealed weapons undercuts one of the primary objectives of religious institutions, including schools, which is to foster peaceful relations within the family and society. Like schools, churches and buildings used for religious purposes 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. Parents should have the certainty of knowing that when their students attend worship services during the school day with members of the parish or church community, that the same restrictions on firearms apply to that worship space as apply to their student's classroom. All who seek the solace of worship should have the comfort of knowing that they need not fear the actions, accidental or otherwise, of their fellow worshippers.

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 would like 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.

It is also important to note that under SB 584, parishes may create a policy to permit the concealed carrying of firearms, but there remain questions as to what the policy can and cannot encompass. Can the parish require licensees to inform the parish when they are carrying so that the parish is aware of how many firearms are on the premises? Is it possible for a parish to limit the number of licensees allowed on the premises at any given time, or restrict access for certain licensees that may pose a security risk to those on the premises? If a licensee fails to comply with church policy is that individual guilty of a Class I felony as specified in Wisconsin Statutes s. 948.605(2)?

Finally, 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 cannot invoke sovereign immunity or take advantage of statutory limits on damages should an incident occur. As in the past, we ask that the State not place an unreasonable burden on places of worship and institutions that opt to offer a sanctuary for those seeking prayer and peace.

We urge you to oppose SB 584. Thank you.

Mark Rask
953 Sundial Lane
Neenah WI, 54956
October 14th, 2021

Senator Roger Roth
Senate District 19
1033 W College Avenue Suite 19
Appleton, WI 54914

Dear Senator Roger Roth:

I am contacting you regarding **2021 Senate Bill 584** which is an act to amend the statutes relating to the "*possession of a firearm by a licensee in a place of worship located on the grounds of a private school.*" My position on this matter is pro in that I firmly believe ALL places of worship should be afforded adequate means to protect their attendees from those who wish to harm them.

Please read this next statement carefully and take it to heart. **By preventing these churches that share grounds with a private school from developing policies that would allow their congregations and workers to carry firearms, the law is making them softer, more vulnerable targets for evil doers.** In other words, the law is painting a target on their back.

I could list the many high profile church shootings as examples of why this legislation is needed but, instead, I would rather drive home the lesson that these acts of violence teach us. That lesson is it takes a good guy with a gun to stop a bad guy with a gun, period.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to pass **2021 Senate Bill 584** to give the good guys a fighting chance.

Sincerely,

Mark Rask

Enclosure

Testimony SB584 to Committe on Judiciary and Public Safety

October 13, 2021

Brian Borke
N3056 Greenwood Rd
Appleton, WI 54913

Senator Roger Roth
Room 313 South
State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Roth:

I wish to support 2021 Senate Bill 584 to allow possession of a firearm by a licensee in a place of worship that happens to share grounds with a private school.

Wisconsin's concealed carry laws have successfully enabled citizens across all political, cultural, racial, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds to protect themselves in urban, suburban, and rural areas. The current law, however, needs to be amended because it overlooks the need for these same responsible citizens to protect themselves in many places of worship.

Places of worship are an attractive target for nefarious people who know that an attached private school that was in session on Friday prevents licensed congregants from being able to defend themselves on Sunday. This is an error that should be addressed, which is why I ask you to promote and pass SB584.

Sincerely,

/signed Brian Borke/

Brian Borke

From: aerburns <aerburns@protonmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, October 13, 2021 2:25 PM
To: Sen.Roth <Sen.Roth@legis.wisconsin.gov>
Subject: Senate Bill 584

Dear Senator Roth,

As a Wisconsin resident who is very concerned with upholding the 2nd amendment of the constitution of the United States wherever possible, I wish to urge you to vote in favor of allowing law abiding citizens to carry firearms in places of worship, unless the institution itself specifically posts signs prohibiting concealed carry on their premises.

Thank you for your service,
Aernie Burns

Sent with ProtonMail Secure Email.

From: james Kedrow <myvoice@oneclickpolitics.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 14, 2021 3:17 PM
To: Sen.Wanggaard
Subject: Please Support SB 584 & SB 570

Re: Please Support SB 584 & SB 570

Dear Senator Wanggaard,

As a fellow Wisconsin resident, I ask you to please support Senate Bills 584 and 570.

SB 584 ensures that I can protect myself and my loved ones while attending religious services. So-called “gun-free zones” simply disarm law-abiding citizens like me and leave us defenseless against criminals who ignore arbitrary boundaries. Decisions involving security should be left for individual places of worship; it is unreasonable for the government to mandate a one-size-fits-all solution.

While federal law currently has the protection offered by SB 570, President Biden has promised to repeal it as a main part of his assault on the Second Amendment. Anti-gun extremists would like nothing better than to impose their gun-ban agenda by bankrupting the firearm industry with frivolous lawsuits against law-abiding businesses for the third party, criminal misuse of their legal products. However, that is as unreasonable as someone attempting to hold automobile makers and dealers responsible for injuries caused by drunk drivers. With SB 570, Wisconsin has a chance to add an additional layer of protection to safeguard our Second Amendment rights.

Sincerely,
james Kedrow
elessar.1956@gmail.co
9921 32nd ave pleasant pr, WI 53158 Constituent

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