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# AZ bill would let guns onto campuses

By Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

PHOENIX — Two Mesa lawmakers are drawing up legislation to give teachers — and some students — a chance to carry firearms on campus.

The proposals by Sen. Karen Johnson and Rep. Russell Pearce would allow anyone who has obtained a state permit to carry a concealed firearm to bring it onto public-school campuses, something now a crime under state law. It also would overrule similar policies at community colleges and state universities.

The prohibition would send a message to would-be criminals not to target schools because they might not be the only ones armed, Johnson said. People age 21 or older can apply for concealed-weapons permits in Arizona.

"These gun-free zones are just open areas," she said. "If a kid gets mad or crazed or some weirdo decides to go into school, he knows there's going to be nobody there to stop them."

Pearce said schools have become "no-self-defense zones."

Johnson said changing the law might deter someone who means harm from deciding to start shooting.

"This way, nobody knows who has a concealed weapon," she said. "But at least they'll know that somebody could."

If that deterrent doesn't work, she said, having someone who is armed and trained might.

"If somebody does start shooting and is crazed, they can be taken down pretty quick," she said.

Pearce, a former Maricopa County sheriff's deputy, said the best ally of law enforcement can be an armed citizen or someone willing to "jump in and help."

"You can't be everywhere," he said. "Policemen respond after the fact."

Reaction at the Capitol has been mixed.

"It's a dangerous idea," said Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Phoenix.

She worried what would happen when someone calls 911 to report an incident.

"Let's say they come into the building," she said. "How do they know who to stop when there's like 18 people wielding guns?"

## Doubts in Tucson

Local school administrators were overwhelmingly wary of the proposed legislation. Here are some of their reactions:

"We, of course, do not allow concealed weapons on our property and if we have any option to continue that, we would. We don't think it's prudent or wise to allow weapons on our campuses."

Terry Downey, associate superintendent of Catalina Foothills School District

"I do not feel it is necessary. I've been in administration for about 11 years. I have never felt that I was personally in danger at any time. I have had to break up fights, I have been with students who are excited and angry, and I have never been personally afraid. I couldn't even imagine an instance where a teacher would need a gun."

Jim Doty, principal of Marana High School

"In Marana, our schools are safe. We have resources in place. and we have a district commitment to ensure that student safety is a priority."

Tamara Crawley, spokeswoman for the Marana Unified School District

"The Legislature has some critically important education issues to deal with, including a significant shortage of funding and problems

But Sen. Paula Aboud, D-Tucson, said she might be able to support such a plan — but only if carrying guns were limited to teachers.

"I can see where she's coming from in light of the tragedies that we've had on the campuses," Aboud said, referring to incidents at Virginia Tech and Columbine High School.

But she said parents rightly would be concerned for their children if other students were carrying guns. Armed teachers present a different situation, Aboud said.

"I think teachers, depending on where they are teaching, experience a tremendous sense of fear," she said. "I think there's a potential for violence almost anywhere."

Rep. Marian McClure, R-Tucson, said she might be persuaded to support some version of the measure.

"I've always believed you've got to worry about the bad guys," she said, rather than law-abiding citizens who are licensed to carry firearms.

Rep. Jack Brown, D-St. Johns, acknowledged the potential for violence but said having more people armed "causes more problems than it solves."

In limiting the measures to those with concealed-weapons permits, they would require that those given the right to bring guns onto campuses undergo background checks, be fingerprinted, go through state-mandated training in laws governing when they are allowed to use deadly force and prove they can handle their firearms.

While guns on public K-12 school campuses are illegal, the law gives other schools some flexibility to set their own rules.

Anne Barton, spokeswoman for the Arizona Board of Regents, said its policies prohibit anyone from bringing a weapon onto a university campus.

University of Arizona spokesman Paul Allvin said offenses are handled as violations of either the student code of conduct or as disciplinary matters for faculty or staff.

At Pima Community College, spokesman David Irwin said the code of conduct prohibits students with weapons.

But he said there's no specific prohibition against others bringing guns to a campus.

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"Schools still are among the very safest places for kids to be. Certainly, any incident of school violence comes to the forefront of anyone's minds because they're so ghastly and so horrible, but those kinds of events are extremely rare. I don't know that placing guns on the hips of teachers is a sound thing to do, given the (relatively low) incidence of these situations.

Todd Jaeger, associate to the superintendent and legal counsel for Amphitheater Public Schools

"We're over here trying to keep guns *out* of campuses. This is not something that will prevent anything. We need prevention. We need people to talk. Even presidents get assassinated and they've got Secret Service surrounding them. This will not help. It will just complicate things beyond comprehension."

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