Open Letter on Campus Carry at West Virginia University

Dear President Gee, Provost McConnell, Vice-President Rob Alsop, Vice-Provost John Campbell, and Vice-President Sharon Martin,

As members of the WVU community, we strongly oppose HB 2519, legislation that would allow people with legal permits to carry concealed guns on state college campuses in West Virginia. We are, furthermore, dismayed by the University’s focus on mitigating the effects rather than fighting this bill.

John Shott, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, was the lone Republican to vote against moving the bill out of committee because his constituency includes Bluefield and Athens, home to Bluefield State College and Concord University. He told the Charleston Gazette Mail that he got the message loud and clear that the “institutions in the counties [he] represents are adamantly opposed to it.”

Why has WVU, the state’s flagship university, not led more effectively?

Every institution of higher learning and campus police department in the state has expressed opposition to campus carry. Students, staff, and faculty deserve to work and teach and learn in environments without deadly weapons, concealed or not. We know what is needed to ensure that students receive the best possible education, and this includes refuge from physical and emotional violence.

We stand with the students of Parkland and thousands of survivors of gun violence who are calling for effective gun control. We stand with former Marine and WVU English Professor Tony Swofford who does not want guns in his classroom: “I will immodestly state that among college professors,” Swofford writes, “I am almost certainly one of the best shooters. But I
would never bring a weapon into a classroom. The presence of a firearm is always an invitation to violence” (24 Feb 2018).

Almost 40,000 people are killed by guns each year in the U.S. Nearly two-thirds of firearm deaths are suicides. More guns in more places will not make us safer.

We do not accept that the NRA and ALEC should be writing educational policy. We do not accept that the presence of guns on campus will do less damage than the absence of guns.

Every day we are told what we cannot afford: fair pay, increased support for graduate education, lowered tuition, student scholarships, upgraded classrooms, and online systems. We cannot afford to divert over $11 million to implement a policy that will work against our educational goals and philosophies. We cannot afford to lose the revenue from out-of-state and international students who will choose to go elsewhere because of this policy.

We urge the WVU administration to support faculty, staff, and students by opposing HB 2519 in its entirety.

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