



March 6, 2018

Statement in Support of Gun Control Measures

The recent mass shooting of fourteen students and three adults at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, has refocused efforts to stem the epidemic of gun violence plaguing the nation. This time the effort has been initiated and led by the surviving students, supported by their teachers, parents, and students across the country. The American Association of University Professors salutes these brave and eloquent young people, many of whom will soon enter colleges and universities. We hope they will continue their activism on our campuses.

Gun violence is not a problem limited to high schools. Colleges and universities have been sites of mass shootings ever since Charles Whitman climbed to the top of the tower at the University of Texas at Austin on August 1, 1966, with an arsenal of high-powered weapons and began shooting, killing at least sixteen people and injuring thirty-one. More recent tragedies at Virginia Tech in 2007, Northern Illinois University in 2008, and Umpqua Community College in Oregon in 2015, among others, compel us to reflect on how we can best ensure the safety of our campuses.

The AAUP has long opposed the presence of firearms on college and university campuses. In 2008 the AAUP Annual Meeting passed a resolution to that effect. In November 2015, the AAUP, the American Federation of Teachers, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges issued a joint statement opposing legislation — so-called "campus carry" statutes — that would permit the carrying of guns on campus. The statement said:

Colleges and universities closely control firearms and prohibit concealed guns on their campuses because they regard the presence of weapons as incompatible with their educational missions. College campuses are marketplaces of ideas, and a rigorous academic exchange of ideas may be chilled by the presence of weapons. Students and faculty members will not be comfortable discussing controversial subjects if they think there might be a gun in the room. . . .

[We] strongly support efforts to make college campuses as safe and weapon-free as possible for students, faculty, staff, parents, and community members. We therefore oppose efforts to enact "campus carry" laws and call for their repeal where they already exist. We encourage colleges and universities to embrace critical incident planning that includes faculty and staff and to advise all faculty and staff of these plans. We further call on these institutions to rely on trained and equipped professional law-enforcement personnel to respond to emergency incidents. State legislative bodies must refrain from

interfering with decisions that are properly the responsibility of the academic community.

In November 2017, the AAUP, along with the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence and the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, submitted an amicus curiae brief in the case of *Glass v. Paxton*, in which a group of faculty members at the University of Texas have challenged as a violation of academic freedom the Texas law permitting concealed handguns in university classrooms. That brief stated:

The decision whether to permit or exclude handguns in a given classroom is, at bottom, a decision about educational policy and pedagogical strategy. It predictably affects not only the choice of course materials, but how a professor can and should interact with her students—how far she should press a student or a class to wrestle with unsettling ideas, how trenchantly and forthrightly she can evaluate student work. Permitting handguns in the classroom also affects the extent to which faculty can or should prompt students to challenge each other. The law and policy thus implicate concerns at the very core of academic freedom: They compel faculty to alter their pedagogical choices, deprive them of the decision to exclude guns from their classrooms, and censor their protected speech.

The AAUP continues to oppose unequivocally any legislation or policy that would compel colleges and universities to permit firearms, concealed or openly carried, on campus. In this we stand with the overwhelming majority of educators across the country, as evidenced by the fact that in the twenty-two states that allow colleges and universities to set their own policies about guns on campus, almost every school has elected not to permit them. Over a dozen other states and the District of Columbia bar guns from campus by statute.

Given the widespread availability of the most deadly weaponry and the growing number of instances in which such weapons have wreaked havoc, however, it is not sufficient only to champion the right of colleges and universities to bar their presence. To ensure the safety of our students, of our faculties, and of all those who work at or visit our campuses, we must speak out in support of broader sensible gun control measures like those proposed by the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

Specifically, the AAUP calls on our members and all faculty and students, on college and university administrators and trustees, and most of all on our political leaders to support

- a total ban on the sale and possession of military-style assault weapons, designed solely to kill human beings, and on high-capacity magazines and bump stocks;
- comprehensive background checks for all who purchase firearms, whether in a gun store or at a gun show, with reasonable restrictions on access to weapons for those with diagnosed mental illness or with a history of violence, including domestic violence;
- a complete universal database of those banned from buying firearms;
- raising the minimum age to purchase firearms to twenty-one.

We therefore also endorse the March 24 March for Our Lives in Washington, DC, as well as the efforts of students to protest gun violence with peaceful walkouts on March 14 and April 20.