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PRESS RELEASE



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Gun proliferation bills pass Senate

More guns in more places do not make us safer

AUSTIN – Senator José Rodríguez issued the following statement regarding Senate Bill 17, the "open carry" bill that passed the full Senate yesterday, and Senate Bill 11, the "campus carry" bill, which passed today:

S.B. 17 authorizes open carry of handguns in Texas by anyone with a license, as long as the handgun is carried in a shoulder or belt holster. The new license to carry created by this bill replaces the existing concealed handgun license. S.B. 11 removes any criminal penalties for carrying on campus, and prohibits colleges and universities from passing rules against carrying handguns on campus.

I support the Second Amendment as a core right provided under the Bill of Rights, but just as all rights must be balanced, so too must the Second Amendment. For example, the First Amendment does not give one the right to yell 'fire' in a crowded theater. Justice Antonin Scalia, one of the most conservative justices to service on the U.S. Supreme Court, has written that the Second Amendment does not give one the right to carry a handgun at any time or anywhere.

At some point, we have to enforce reasonable regulations on the proliferation of deadly weapons in public places. More guns in more places do not make us safer. If this bill passes the Legislature and is signed by the governor, we will begin to see guns at the supermarket, the movie theater, and the drug store, just to name a few.

Unfortunately, the supporters of S.B. 17 and S.B. 11 chose to ignore the objections of law enforcement, and they would not even accept reasonable amendments to make the proliferation of guns less threatening for all of us. I submitted amendments to S.B. 17 that would have:

- *Required an annual background check to ensure that individuals with a Class A or Class B Misdemeanor in Texas, or a felony in Texas or any other state, cannot purchase a firearm.*
- *Required applicants for a handgun license to undergo the same training as that taken by police officers. This is important because one of the rationales often given for open carry advocates is that they may be in a position to stop a criminal with a gun. Police undergo intensive training to determine when it is appropriate and lawful to draw their gun. Handgun licensees should go through the same training to ensure public safety.*
- *Closed a loophole in Texas law that allows someone who loses their license in Texas to use a license from another state. In Texas, one loses the right to a concealed handgun permit for five years if convicted of a Class A or Class B Misdemeanor. However, the law does not address what happens if a person has a license from another state, and since Texas recognizes out-of-state licenses, this creates a loophole that remains open.*
- *Creates a simple sign for businesses that want to exclude guns from their property. Currently, the requirements for such a sign are confusing and onerous.*

I also submitted amendments to SB 11 that would have:

- *Prohibited handguns in university health clinics and areas where federal classified research is taking place. Such research typically involves oxygen lines, chemicals and other combustible items that could be an even greater threat with the accidental discharge of a firearm.*
- *Exempted health-related institutions from mandated acceptance of guns on campus. Such institutions have chemical, biological or radioactive agents that make the presence of guns even more dangerous.*
- *Prohibited handguns at public speaking engagements on campus.*

The debate over guns should not be all-or-nothing. Even in the so-called Wild West, local sheriffs controlled the presence of guns in towns. There is no reason to put more guns in more places, and I will continue to work for common-sense safety proposals that respect the Second Amendment and public safety.

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Senate Hispanic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.