

*"Laws that forbid the carrying of arms...disarm only those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crimes. Such laws make things worse for the assaulted and better for the assailants; they serve rather to encourage than prevent homicides, for an unarmed man may be attacked with greater confidence than an armed one."*  
Cesare Beccaria, *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764)

In 1995, then-Senator Jerry Patterson authored Senate Bill 60 in an effort to create the framework for the Texas Concealed Handgun License (CHL) process we know today. At the time, Patterson was lambasted by the media and many of his colleagues for pushing an idea as harebrained and dangerous as concealed carry. Still, after a long legislative battle and repeated cries of "blood in the streets," SB 60 became law.

Today, acquiring a CHL in Texas is no walk in the park. Citizens aged 21 or older will go through at least 10 hours of classroom training, a written examination, a live-fire shooting proficiency test, and extensive state and federal background checks before they can even acquire the \$140 license. Predictably, Texas Department of Public Safety statistics show that the average CHL-holder is a model citizen. In 2011, Texans committed 63,679 CHL-disqualifying crimes statewide. Among these, only 120 were committed by CHL-holders—that's 0.1884 percent<sup>1</sup>.

Why then, as I have asked my colleagues, does the Texas Legislature disarm our most law-abiding citizens on college campuses? How can we as public servants justify denying an individual's God-given right of self-preservation—especially in a setting in which criminals have repeatedly proven they will attack the defenseless? These questions led me to file Senate Bill 182, the Campus Personal Protection Act, allowing CHL-holding faculty, staff, students and visitors to carry a concealed handgun on their person throughout public higher education campuses.

Private institutions are included in SB 182, but they are allowed to create their own rules or prohibitions so that we honor their private property rights. SB 182 maintains the same CHL prohibitions that exist off-campus, ensuring CHL-holders cannot carry inside on-campus hospitals or medical facilities, K-12 education facilities, sporting venues, or bars. The bill also outlines the right of an institution to define firearm storage policies for CHL-holders living in on-campus housing facilities, and institutions are provided with liability protection in the event that the lawful or unlawful discharge of a firearm should occur.

At this moment, SB 182 is stalled in the Senate Criminal Justice Committee and my request for a hearing has not yet been scheduled. The House companion of our bill, HB 972 by Representative Allen Fletcher (R-Cypress), passed the House Public Safety Committee on April 11. Despite best efforts to move the bill out of committee unaltered, several functional changes were amended onto the bill. Representative Fletcher is committed to seeing these changes improved upon during debate on the full House floor on May 4<sup>th</sup>.

Though passage of the Campus Personal Protection Act is not certain, I will continue to fight for the bill and the right to self-defense.

*Senator Brian Birdwell is a native Texan, decorated military veteran, lifelong conservative Republican, survivor of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon, proud husband and father. He currently represents District 22 in the Texas Senate.*

<sup>1</sup><http://www.dps.texas.gov/RSD/CHL/Reports/ConvictionRatesReport2011.pdf>