Senate Bill 45: Authorizing the carrying of concealed handguns without a license under the personal and family protection act.

Loren Stanton
President, Kansas Chapter, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence
and Board Member, Missouri/Kansas Grandmothers Against Gun Violence

The Kansas Chapter of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and the Missouri/Kansas Grandmothers Against Gun Violence urge defeat of Senate Bill 45 in the interests of public safety and health.

People who decide to carry a gun in public also carry great responsibilities, and we believe the law should reassure Kansans that these individuals are up to that responsibility. This bill would remove the minimal reassurance that now exists.

Recent events nationally have demonstrated that even law enforcement officers with long hours of annual crisis training still make questionable, and sometimes disastrous, judgments about when and how they use their weapons. This point is not made to indict law enforcement officers but to emphasize the difficultly of their task and the tragic consequences that come with an error in judgment.

To believe that civilians will consistently make proper choices based on very little training is wishful thinking. To believe they will make good decisions based on absolutely no formal training is dangerous thinking.

Citizen concern about this issue is clear. An ABC News/Washington Post poll conducted in December asked Americans if they were either "very confident or somewhat confident that the police in this country are adequately trained to avoid use of excessive force." Only 54 percent said yes. Public confidence in a civilian's ability to make such decisions unquestionably is much lower, even with the minimal training Kansas now requires.

We should not strive to lower the bar for safety to accommodate those unable to appreciate the value of a small fee and a small bit of essential training. If too poor to afford the fee, their priorities are wrong. If too irresponsible to undergo proper training, they are undeserving of a permit.

We can argue over how many accidents, incidents and crimes involve concealed carriers, but it is indisputable that many mishaps and offenses do occur. Because of that, we should be talking about more training for gun carriers, not the abandonment of it. And we should not remove the permit requirement for background checks, which provides the added safeguard of keeping weapons our of dangerous individuals' hands.

Our state requires permits and training for a host of professions and activities that affect public health and welfare. Architects, medical professionals, restaurants, florists and many others must meet certain standards. We even require training and permitting for a manicurist who wields nothing more threatening than cuticle scissors and a nail file.

Responsible gun owners who hunt must acquire a permit as well. If we don't need a permit to carry a gun for shooting people perceived as a threat, why would we require permits to shoot unthreatening game or to catch fish.

Some people, including members of the Legislature, have suggested that even greater liberalization of gun laws will make Kansas more alluring to gun manufacturers seeking a home. We hope that is no motivation for this bill. Undermining public safety for the sake of a minor economic development bump not only would be ethically disturbing, it would make this state less attractive to the many business executives who focus on quality of life when choosing a new location.

Subtracting safety training cannot possibly add up to improved safety. Doing so opens us to considerable risks and regrets. Each time a concealed carry incident took place in the future involving an untrained individual, those who advocated this policy should be required to ask of themselves: Could we have prevented this tragedy?

I hope no one in this room ever needs to ask himself or herself that question.