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Testimony in opposition to HB 2220
House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Rep. John Barker, chair
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am the Executive Director of Kansas Interfaith Action. We are a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social, economic and environmental justice issues. I am here today to speak in strong opposition to HB 2220.

My organization represents over 2500 people of faith and conscience throughout the state of Kansas. The communities I work with, particularly clergy, are very concerned about the impact of concealed carry on the people who study and work at Kansas' public colleges and universities, public hospitals, and community mental health centers.

My testimony today will be similar to, but the reverse of, that I gave in support of HB 2074. It's a strange thing to see a piece of legislation get such widespread support from the people who are affected by it, as HB 2074 did and does, and then see it stuck in committee and another piece of legislation, which does exactly the opposite, get a hearing.

For the past 10 years Kansas' gun lobby, and its supportive legislators, have remade Kansas gun laws, steadily and with purpose, until today we have the most lax gun laws in the entire country. Not only that, but the state government has expanded its authority to prohibit local authorities, such as municipalities and, as in this case, university officials, from instituting their own reasonable gun safety regulations. HB 2220 is part of that effort.

Legislators who support this effort like to say that they are supporting gun rights. But they are very choosy in what constitutional rights they choose to prioritize. Let me repeat something that I said in response to a question about HB 2074 — this legislation has nothing to do with the Second Amendment. It is well within the rights of government authorities to limit the carry of weapons in sensitive places, such as public buildings and schools. That's why there are many responsible gun owners who don't want concealed carry on college campuses.

Let me hit the highlights of my previous testimony:

- The main denominational bodies of mainline Christian, Jewish and Unitarian denominations consider gun violence to be one of the most vital issues facing this country, as the United Methodist Church puts it, “an issue of increasing concern and a priority public health issue.” They call for changes in both society and law to address it. This is based on scripture and on time honored teachings about respect for life and the importance of prioritizing peace, and I am happy to discuss these teachings with any member of the committee who would like to.

- It is quite clear, through my travels and conversations, in the research from the Docking Institute, and in the testimony that has been given in front of this committee, that the vast majority of people who are associated with the universities and colleges are opposed to concealed carry on their campuses. Members of this committee might think they know better, but I don't.
- We have already and will continue to lose teachers and students as a result of concealed carry. Given the serious "brain-drain" we already face in Kansas, we can ill afford to give our "best and brightest" such a powerful reason to leave the state.
- The implicit presence of guns in every situation in college is counter to the institution's mission of exposing young people to new and challenging ideas. People in university settings will always be wondering if they shouldn't teach this or that topic, or have this or that heated discussion, lest someone take violent offense.
- Universities have research facilities that include dangerous materials, including chemicals and explosives. If a bullet were to hit one of them it could cause great damage.
- KU Med Center will lose away doctors, staff and patients if this law goes into effect.
- The use and sometimes abuse of alcohol in colleges and universities complicates the personal responsibility that we depend on to make sure people who concealed carry do so safely.
- There is no longer any permitting or training required to concealed carry in Kansas, so we will have people carrying who are not even required to know enough not to point them at people.
- And as the public health expert testimony will tell you, it is far more likely that a gun will be used on one's self or on someone one knows than on an assailant. As law enforcement will tell you, despite the mythology, more guns do not equal more safety.

In the university setting, with the emotional challenges of that time of life and environment, having untrained young people carrying on campus is a tragedy waiting to happen. The students don't want it, the faculty and staff don't want it, the administrations don't want it, the parents don't want it, law enforcement doesn't want it, the religious community doesn't want it, and public health officials think it's a bad idea. It doesn't make sense and we call on it to be stopped.

I urge you to defeat HB 2220, and while you're at it, pass HB 2074 out to the full House for consideration.

Thank you for your attention, I will be happy to take questions at the appropriate time.