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**Testimony in support of SB 235, amending the Kansas Personal and Family Protection Act
Senate Committee on Ways and Means, Carolyn McGinn, chair
March 23, 2017**

Good morning Madame Chair, members of the committee. My name is Rev. Sarah Oglesby-Dunegan, and I am the pastor of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Topeka, as well as serving as board chair of Kansas Interfaith Action, in which capacity I speak to you today. KIFA is 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 and economic justice issues. I am here today in support of SB 235— with reservations.

I want to make it clear to you that we support excluding guns from public hospitals, community mental health centers, and the other institutions listed in SB 235. However, we urge the inclusion of public colleges and universities in this legislation.

We have been working on this issue since last summer, I can say categorically —and the research released from the Docking Institute backs this up— that the vast majority of people associated with Kansas’ public colleges and universities — students, faculty and staff, parents and grandparents of students and prospective students, law enforcement officials, faith leaders, and public health experts — are opposed to concealed carry on campuses. Many times people have said to me, “I am a strong supporter of the Second Amendment, and I don’t think there should be concealed carry on campus.” I’ve had legislators say the same thing.

Faculty members and graduate teaching assistants believe that the conditions of their employment are materially changed by the introduction of concealed carry. I have direct, personal knowledge of several professors who are leaving their employment due to this issue, and a good number of parents from both in and out of state have told us that they will not send their kids to Kansas universities if campus carry goes into effect. 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.

College is a time when assumptions are challenged, when we rub shoulders with the kinds of people whom we may never have met before, when we learn new and difficult ideas. Guidelines put out by faculty at the University of Houston in response to Texas’ campus carry law warned professors against speaking about controversial issues, lest someone take deadly offense.¹ That’s not the kind of open atmosphere we want and need at our colleges and universities.

We also know that there are students who will not be allowed to carry even under the current legislation, especially international students. Many of these students are concerned about the growing hostility towards immigrants and people of color in society currently, and that, combined with easy access to guns, make tragedies like the one in Olathe recently all the more possible.

Universities have research facilities that include dangerous materials. If a bullet were to hit one of them it could cause great damage. KU asked the Attorney General to allow them to exempt some of these areas from the law, but he rejected the request.

The cost of putting in “adequate security measures” on even one campus building is prohibitively expensive, especially at a time when the state is cutting funding for our public universities. They can't afford to keep their students and teachers safe. That's why so many faculty senate and student government bodies have called for campus carry to be stopped.

But I am here to represent the faith community, and this is a very important issue to people of faith and conscience. The statements of the main denominational bodies on this issue concern the general issue of gun violence rather than campus carry in particular. They decry the rising incidence of gun violence in society and urge legislative action to address it. For example, the United Methodist Church's Book of Resolutions says,

No appeals to individual autonomy are sufficient to justify our church's ignorance of this threat [of gun violence]. The need to prevent the incidence of firearm-related injury and death is an issue of increasing concern and a priority public health issue. The United Methodist Church is among those religious communions calling for social policies and personal lifestyles that bring an end to senseless gun violence.

The action-item section of the resolution calls for “the development of advocacy groups within local congregations to advocate for the eventual reduction of the availability of guns in society.”²

Every mainline Christian denomination, the Unitarian Universalist Association, and the denominational arms of the Jewish community all have similar statements. The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism is representative of these bodies in its call for such measures as universal background checks and increased access to mental health services. These measures, and not the introduction of unregulated guns into our public college and university campuses, community mental centers, and hospitals, are the answers to the epidemic of gun violence in our society.

As public health experts 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 asking for trouble. It doesn't make sense and we call on it to be stopped.

And finally, no less an expert on the Constitution as James Madison, when putting together the charter for the University of Virginia, along with his fellow Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson, said, ““No student shall, within the precincts of the University, introduce, keep or use any spirituous or vinous liquors, keep or use weapons or arms of any kind ...” This should put to rest the specious constitutional argument we too often hear in such cases.

I urge you to amend SB 235 to include college campuses, and then to pass the measure favorably on to the full Senate for consideration.

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

¹Inside Higher Ed, “Don't Go There”, Feb. 16, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/02/24/u-houston-faculty-senate-suggests-changes-teaching-under-campus-carry>

²Book of Resolutions: Gun Violence <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/gun-violence>