

Testimony for HB1793
Name: Brooke Harnden

I am testifying today because I am a woman, and I do not intend to become a victim. I am a current student at Saint Anselm College, where our only designated self-defense option is a course called RAD, or “Rape Aggression Defense”, and this course still only teaches *basic* self-defense. Prior to researching my campus’s policies on self-defense for this testimony, I was never made aware that this course exists, despite it being free for students. My college doesn’t even clearly state whether or not we’re permitted to carry *pepper spray*- a non-lethal and common deterrent. Despite this, many of my fellow female students have taken to carrying it in addition to knives, even though the college would pursue disciplinary action against us if they knew. In short, we would be punished for simply seeking to protect ourselves. For wanting to do everything in our power to not be violated by rapists, or assaulted, or murdered. For being smart enough to know that “no means no” means nothing without something to back it up.

Male or female, our rights do not end the minute we become students, and in New Hampshire, we’re afforded the right to bear arms, and, per RSA 627:4, the right to defend ourselves and others with lethal force, if necessary. I spend roughly half the year on campus, and for half the year I’m unable to exercise these rights. The only “weapon” they permit us to have is our own two hands, and even that because they haven’t found a way to regulate them yet.

A common counterargument I’ve heard is that banning weapons will make us safer. I used to believe this, too, until I saw that Brown University, which bans students from owning weapons, still had a shooting. Two students died. Two students that, had they been allowed to defend themselves, may still be alive. Preventing us from having weapons on campus has not made us safer, it has only prevented us from defending ourselves. School shooters don’t respect a college weapons ban, and if anything, all these bans do is broadcast that we are defenseless against them.

As it stands, it’s only a matter of time before I become a victim. I’ve been approached by strange men on campus. Another woman I know has been followed by one. I’m even afraid that even my testimony today will cause someone to seek retaliatory action against me, action that, as it stands, I have no way to defend myself against. I am at college more than half the year, and during this time, I am not even permitted to carry a pocket knife. I am forced to be defenseless.

I’m not for unfettered access to guns, but I do believe that myself and other students have a right to defend ourselves, and a right not to be victims in the making. The reality of our world is that violence exists. This violence does not simply stop when you set foot on a college campus. I’m not even saying that I believe all students need to be carrying guns. But I do believe that should HB1793 pass, its mere existence will act as a deterrent towards acts of violence, and allow students to choose, for themselves, how they best feel protected. It’s my body, and I deserve to be allowed to defend it. I am not a sitting duck, and I am not a victim. Do not make me be either.