

My name is Amanda Collins. Thank you for considering my testimony in support of the new version of Senate Bill 59 proposed by Senator Mike Green that would reform Michigan's concealed carry laws. I am going to share with you my experience of being denied my right to participate in my own self-defense, how my situation could have had a drastically different outcome, and why I have such strong convictions regarding this particular legislation.

On the evening of October 22, 2007 during my third year of pursuing my degree in Secondary Education and English at the University of Nevada, Reno, my life was irreversibly changed. That evening, I attended a night class located in the College of Education. In an attempt to ensure my safety I parked in the Whalen parking garage, on the ground floor, across from where my class was being held. I deliberately did this so I would not have to walk across campus alone at night.

At 10:00pm I walked out of room #224 with a group of students heading towards the parking garage. We made a habit of walking together as we were all always told the rule of "strength in numbers." During our walk we discussed and compared answers from the rigorous exam we had just survived. That night I was the only one who had parked on the ground floor and as we reached the garage I broke off from the group. Heading towards my car I surveyed under and around my vehicle to make sure it was safe to approach. The manner in which I approached my car was nothing out of the ordinary for me. Due to the martial-arts training I received when I was younger I did not have to consciously make an effort to be hyper-vigilant about my surroundings, it was second nature. I was confident I had just aced my exam and anxious to call my boyfriend who I knew would be my fiancé in a matter of days.

My blissful, carefree train of thought was abruptly interrupted when I was grabbed from behind by a man who was much larger than me. He forced me to the cold cement between a truck and a sedan and pressed a cold pistol against my temple. As he clicked the safety to his firearm off, a sound I knew well, he told me not to say anything. Laying on the cold cement, completely defenseless while this man brutally raped me I wondered if I was going to die, it was clear to me this man had the propensity to kill. The terror I felt in those moments continued to haunt me for the next thirteen months, while my attacker remained at large, in ways that only other rape survivors can understand. In November 2008 the man who raped me was captured by the Reno Police Department and the face that haunted my nightmares had a name, James Biela. Mr. Biela did not have a license to carry a concealed firearm.

Mr. Beila would later be convicted in District Court of not only raping me at gun point but also kidnapping and raping one other woman as well as for the rape and murder of a third victim Brianna Dennison, who became well known in the Reno, Nevada community.

On October 22, 2007 my right to say, "no." was taken from me by both James Beila and the current law that forbids licensed permit holders to carry their permitted weapon in certain areas. At an institution of higher education, James Beila degraded my body by raping me and the existing law rendered me defenseless against him by denying me my right as a licensed CCW carrier to have my firearm with me on campus. Had I been afforded the opportunity to legally carry then, I would have at some point during my rape been able to stop James Beila and the case that is so well known across northern Nevada would have had a very different outcome.

As a part of the trial preparation, I was required to revisit the crime scene. I have seen the efforts the university systems have put forth to improve security, and they remain inadequate. A call box potentially located directly above my head, as Mr. Beila straddled me on the ground, would have not been any more help to me than the police where that night. I was raped less than 100 feet away from their campus police office, on the same floor where they park their cruisers. I was twenty-two-years-old when I faced my worst fear, defenseless. I never thought in my wildest dreams I would find myself in such a situation. Allowing law abiding adults to carry their permitted concealed weapons in all areas on campus can protect other potential victims from experiencing the loss and heartbreak that both my family and I have endured.

Please consider, most rapes go unreported as did mine initially. While I am only talking about one incident involving two other cases, we have no way of knowing just how many assaults actually occur on campus.

My case is a perfect example that despite law enforcement's best efforts to ensure our safety; they are unable to be everywhere at once. All I wanted was a chance to be able to defend myself and being able to carry that night would have given me that chance. I believe the choice to participate in one's own defense should be left to the individual. That individual choice should not be mandated by the government. If the government is going to deny law abiding men and women the choice of participating in their own defense, then it assumes the responsibility of protecting the individual. I know from my own experience and knowledge that despite its best efforts, the University systems have failed miserably in undertaking this responsibility.

As the law abiding victim of the crime scene much more than my right to say "no" was taken from me when I was raped. After that night every time I stepped onto UNR's campus I was inundated with flash backs from what I survived. Enduring every class after that was an accomplishment for me. As a result the following semester I failed two classes and lost my millennium scholarship. Several times I contemplated not ever going back to campus because the emotional toll it took every time was so draining I barely had the energy to concentrate on the lectures and discussions that were occurring. Six days after I was brutally raped at gun point in a "gun free zone" I was proposed to. The excitement and blissfulness I am told every bride feels while planning a wedding a preparing for marriage eluded me as I was attempting to repress the memory of the violent crime committed against me. Five months into my marriage Mr. Beila was caught and I was made to relive the worst ten minutes of my life countless times during the process of seeking justice. The emotional toll caused my husband and me to endure two miscarriages and sixteen months of infertility. For several months I contemplated suicide, I was not murdered, but the young adult I was died in that parking garage and who I was becoming was forever changed. Legalized concealed carry wherever a person has a right to be would have saved my family and me lot of unnecessary torment.

If the purpose of the current law is to ensure the safety to those on university property then it is not serving that objective. I obeyed the law and left my firearm at home in order to avoid possible expulsion from school and losing my CCW permit. My education and CCW permit were valuable only to me when I encountered James Beila who was neither a student or a CCW permit holder, but intent on committing sexual assault. Forfeiting his non-existent education and CCW permit did not serve as a deterrent to him, furthermore during his sentencing he received an enhancement charge of only one year for the use of a deadly weapon while raping me. As the current law stands, the individual who possesses a CCW permit has far more to lose if they carry in certain areas on campus than a criminal who is intent on breaking the law. Had I been allowed to legally carry on campus on October 22, 2007, I would not have been an easy target and perhaps the possibility of encountering a CCW permit holder would have been enough of a deterrent for Mr. Beila. Currently the law allows law abiding citizens to become easy targets while ensuring no one's safety. While working through the healing process of being raped I have been able to forgive Mr. Beila for everything I was subjected to due to his actions; however, I continue to be enraged that I was legislated into being a victim.

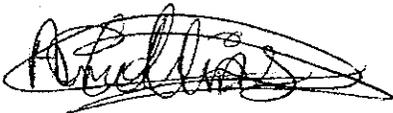
I view concealed carry as, "the ultimate choice" for a woman. Women talk about not allowing the government to mandate what goes on inside their bodies, but then some women are willing allow their self-protection to be arbitrated by a third party. I am not one of those women who is comfortable entrusting my protection to another person. I am supportive of an additional, nine hours and ninety-four rounds fired, training to be required for law abiding individuals to be able to carry their permitted concealed weapon throughout university campuses, in the same manner individuals are able to do so, everywhere else throughout their day to day lives.

The unanswered question of my life is and will remain to be, "What would have changed if I was carrying my weapon that night?" it is a question that continually keeps me awake at night as I replay the worst ten minutes of my life over and over again with several different possibilities, however one end result remains... had I been allowed to carry on October 22, 2007 two other rapes would have never happened and Brianna Denison would still be alive today.

I want to leave you with just one question: Just how does rendering me defenseless protect you against a violent crime?

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda Collins', written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Amanda Collins