

West Valley View

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College officials oppose bill allowing students to pack guns on campus

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There may be pistol-packing students at one Avondale campus if some Arizona lawmakers get their way.

On Monday, the Senate Judiciary Committee, by a 5-3 vote, passed Senate Bill 1474, which would allow concealed handguns on public universities and **community colleges**.

Under the measure, anyone 21 or older with a concealed-weapons permit would be allowed to carry a gun on campus.

Schools such as **Estrella Mountain Community College** in Avondale could keep guns out of buildings if students were provided with secure gun lockers.

The Senate committee handed down its decision after opposition was offered by a host of critics, including Rufus Gasper, chancellor of the Maricopa County **Community College** District.

Gasper argued that except for law-enforcement personnel, it would be a bad idea to allow students and others to carry weapons at **Estrella Mountain** and the other nine **colleges** within the district.

"The Maricopa County **Community Colleges** believe that SB 1474 starts from a false premise - that campuses would be safer if students were allowed to carry guns," Gasper said in a press release.

"There is no evidence to support that concept," Gasper added. "In fact, I believe our campuses will be less safe if guns were allowed. Faced with an emergency, our public safety officers and local police may encounter a situation in which several people - only one of whom is the criminal - have guns."

The gun bill now goes to the full Senate for a vote and then to the Arizona House for further consideration.

If the measure passes the Legislature and Gov. Jan Brewer signs it into law, it could go into effect as early as this summer.

SB 1474 has been revised from a bill that Brewer vetoed last year.

Several Democratic lawmakers have opposed the measure, including Steve Gallardo whose District 13 serves part of the West Valley, including Tolleson.

"There is no substantiated evidence that shows allowing guns on a public school campus would create a safer learning environment," Gallardo said.

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