

Peoria Assn. Of Pastors For Community & Spiritual Renewal
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To The Honorable Mayor Jim Ardis

Mayor Peoria, Illinois

Dear Mayor Ardis,

This letter is to personally express our position regarding the current proposal of “concealed carry” as a right of citizens under an experimental program in Peoria.

Whether “carry” is lawful or unlawful, we are not in agreement with the proposal or with any additional promotion of handgun use within the City of Peoria. We are most certainly opposed to placing handguns in a concealed manner in the hands of citizens, whose motives cannot be determined and whose actions can only be based on subjective interpretations of the intents of others. Community policing should be left to police professionals, and the community should further hold those professionals to the high standards that we expect and deserve as citizens of the community. We do not agree with any sentiment that promotes citizens taking the law into their own hands, either through direct or veiled threats or posturing with weapons of any sort.

Be it known that this issue IS NOT to be confused with our Constitutional right to bear arms. The privilege of bearing arms has been afforded all citizens of the United States through our insightful founding fathers, however we do not believe that any interpretation of the Constitution affords citizens the right to superimpose their own view of peace upon their environments or others without due process which hinges upon a proper system of law. We believe that “concealed carry”

undermines the right and orderly process of law and civility that is essential to any free society and community.

My personal interaction with you began at the end of June 2007. Might I remind you that there were 12 murders that had occurred to that point in the year and Peoria was set to exceed the 2006 total of 17 murders. At that time the Peoria Association Of Pastors For Community & Spiritual Renewal sponsored a march and community prayer rally event against crime and violence. In fact, the same week of our event there were 3 murders. We applied prayer and action as a method of addressing Peoria's crime problem. We used no guns, did not encourage the use of weapons to address the problem and called others Christians to stand within the community to help make a difference. In the 2 year period of time since, Peoria has experienced only 15 murders. To restate, the total murders in Peoria over a 2 year period is less than the total murders in both 2006 and 2007.

Although no rate of murder is acceptable, these results were gained without the use or encouragement of any citizen to resort to violence as a method of maintaining their environments or self-defense. In fact after the rally we held a gun exchange which was the first of it's kind in Peoria, whose funding, as confirmed by City Council voting records, you opposed. That event allowed both citizens and the Police to speak to our association and its membership. What we heard was this:

...citizens that were glad to rid their environments of weapons that could be stolen and used by criminals for alternate purposes and to commit crime. We heard from citizens who had decided to give right living a try by turning in weapons that represented bad and less desirable events in their lives. We heard from police

officers in the field who were excited about the possibility of saving the life of a fellow citizen by removing a gun from the wrong hands. Many of those same officers, that interact with citizens everyday, stated that an additional stress and problem that they encounter in the field comes from the mystery and sometimes surprise of concealed weapons.

Mr. Mayor, your suggestion turns back the hand of progress that the citizens of this community have made in dealing with and fighting crime and relegates responsibilities to those who are able to fend for themselves through the use of weapons. Your idea, as backed even by the Police Chief himself, sends a horrible message that crime is out of control in Peoria and that citizens are desperate to seek alternative means in dealing with the criminal element in this city.

We reject the notion that Peoria should be an experimental ground for a what amounts to a "wild-west" citizen's policing initiative. There is certainly room for a better city and many improvements as it pertains to crime, but this suggestion is a complete step backwards from the plateaus that have been reached as a community.

Both you and Police Chief Settingsgaard have said that "concealed carry" will cause criminals to think twice before committing a crime. As I said in my letter to the Pastors, "I don't know what world that idea comes from." I beg you to present one emergency room technician or physician from either one of our three hospitals, to certify that more handguns will decrease crime or even the physical injuries that they treat regularly many times due to handgun use.

For example, my godson, Mario McGee, had a valid FOID card allowing him the ability to have, own, and operate a weapon, and a handgun in particular. It is suspected that the people that killed him, breaking into the home, was well aware that Mario could have had a weapon. From the criminal's standpoint, there was no second thought about taking Mario's life. I would venture to say that IF a weapon had been used his mother would have certainly been killed also. Speculation regarding what "wouldn't happen" is merely wishful thinking, superimposing reasonable thoughts on the minds of unreasonable individuals, and is not in the best interest of the innocent, and does not facilitate the peaceful resolution of potentially dangerous situations.

Another concern is this; who are you encouraging the citizens to protect themselves from? Crime has no face or set demographic. One thing is sure however, we all know that there is a disparity among those who can have a handgun legally. Unfortunately, there are a disproportionate number of blacks and minorities who have felonies on their records and who do not and cannot qualify for a weapons card or carry a gun legally.

Your proposal seeks to pit the law-abiding citizens against not only the criminal who obtains a gun illegally but also the law-abiding citizen who cannot qualify for a gun regardless of race. Not to mention those who cannot use a gun. As stated, many of those individuals, by a disproportionate number are black. This not only sets more of a disparity between social and racial classes in Peoria, but it also promotes an "us against them" type of view. This type of posture ratchets up perceived physical threats and encourages violent actions and responses. In other words, "you have your gun, and I'll have mine too, whoever shoots first wins." Is

this the new strategy for attracting business and talented individuals to the Peoria area?

This sort of proposal does not solve any of the city's problems of crime; it only increases the potential that there will be more crime and an inappropriate response to crime at all levels. One cannot pour gasoline on a fire and expect the fire to decrease. In this case, we have a fire that needs professionals to help solve the problems of recidivism, undereducation and lack of employment opportunity, not promote vigilantism.

A pastor has told me that criminals are cowards. Although that may be true in many cases, might I remind you that bigger guns do not make heroes. If this were to take effect, criminals will likely be more blatant in their attacks and more insensitive in their efforts to commit crime and violence.

At a time of great distress Jesus appropriately taught:

"...Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Mt. 26:52

We can take a sword in the form of a gun, but our efforts to bring lasting change to this community will perish along with it. With all due respect, we ask that you not seek to establish this proposal. We also encourage others who are of biblical courage to likewise stand against this initiative in any and all of its forms. Thank you.

In HIS Service,

Pastor Harvey Burnett ~ Exec. Director