

CALL TO ACTION – ELIMINATE OPEN CARRY FIREARMS IN MICHIGAN SCHOOLS

When it comes to guns, Michigan is an “open carry” state. This means that people who lawfully purchase handguns generally may wear them in outside holsters whether or not they have a license to carry a concealed handgun. In Michigan, open carry practices allow lawful gun owners to openly carry rifles and shotguns as well as handguns.

Michigan law creates “gun free zones” [MCL 750.234d] and “weapons free school zones” [MCL 750.237a] where gun possession or use is severely restricted. Gun free zones include:

- Banks or depository financial institutions;
- Churches, temples, synagogues or other houses of worship;
- A court;
- A theatre;
- A sports arena;
- A day care center;
- A hospital; and
- A bar, restaurant or store licensed to sell alcohol and liquor.

Gun free zone laws apply to persons whether or not they have a license to carry a concealed handgun.

Michigan weapons free school zone law describes who may carry weapons on school property and under what circumstances. This law, however, applies **only** to individuals who do not have a license to carry a concealed weapons permit.

Michigan law therefore currently permits people who have Michigan concealed weapons permits to openly carry firearms on school property and in schools, but evidently does not permit individuals who do not have concealed weapons permits to carry firearms openly on school property or in schools.

The Respect ABILITY Law Center has had multiple calls from Michigan families questioning why adults are allowed to openly carry a gun into their child’s school, necessitating a school lock down and traumatizing their children.

School districts develop their own lockdown procedures which may include:

- Locking classroom doors;
- Lowering or closing any blinds;
- Placing students against the wall, so that the intruder cannot see them looking in the door;
- Turning out lights and computer monitors;
- Keeping students quiet;

- Students or staff in bathrooms, should move to a stall, locking it and standing on the toilet;
- Physical education classes being held in the gym should move into a locker room, locking all doors, and finding a safe area;
- Students in the cafeterias should move to the nearest classrooms;
- If students and teachers are outside the school building, they should stop, drop, and remain still;
- Anyone in the hallway should move to the closest classroom immediately;
- Nurses/cafeteria workers/support staff should stay in the area they are in, secure the doors, and turn out the lights;
- Students and staff in the library should remain in the library. Librarians should lock the doors, turn out the lights, and locate a safe area;
- If classroom changes are part of the school routine, they are suspended while the lockdown continues;
- Police are called and arrive at the school, frequently with fire department assistance.

Lockdowns frighten children. Imagine the child who has autism and requires a strict schedule in order to succeed at school. Consider the children who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices to navigate at school. What about students who are deaf or blind who may be directed to unfamiliar areas. How about the students who have seizure disorders or other medical issues that are triggered by traumatic events, causing seizures and other reactions that create a possibility that a student might be injured.

The Respect ABILITY Law Center, like the parents and members of the public who have contacted us, are profoundly concerned about the impact lockdowns have on students, parents and families, educators and school staff. It never occurred to us that an adult could legally walk into a school openly carrying a handgun or rifle just because they have the “right” to do so. A child’s right to be safe in school and not traumatized by “open carry” lockdowns is greater than an individual’s right to carry a firearm into a school just because they can.

We encourage parents, school staff and all who care about our children and school staff members who are being traumatized by those who openly carry firearms in our schools to contact their state legislators, governor, school superintendent and school board members. We have attached a sample letter you might wish to use to guide you in communicating your concerns.

Michigan schools place a premium on time actually spent educating students. School lockdowns implemented because of open carry situations steal time from educational activities and traumatize all who are involved in or affected by the lockdowns. We must work together to illuminate the open carry on school grounds issue and the problems it creates and work together to solve those problems for students and school personnel.