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Concealed handgun licenses surge among young Texans

ABC survey: Half of the country supports ban

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Since the beginning of the year, Texas has seen a surge in citizens seeking concealed handgun licenses, with an increase in first-time applicants younger than 26.

The Texas Department of Public Safety recorded a 24 percent increase in applications from citizens in their early 20s during the first five months of 2008, compared with the same period in 2007. Five percent of the 300,000 active license holders are younger than 26, according to the department.

Students for Concealed Carry on Campus, a non-partisan organization with 31,000 members nationwide, including one chapter at UT and 24 chapters in Texas, contends that the gun ban on university campuses only serves to disarm the law-abiding students who might be able to stop tragedies like the Virginia Tech shooting.

Texas Republican Rep. Joe Driver, of Garland, plans to file a bill in the upcoming legislative session that calls for lifting the gun ban on college campuses in Texas.

"Individuals who have undergone intensive background checks and extensive training in order to get their concealed handgun license should be able to protect themselves on campus just as they do everywhere else," said Driver, who is chairman of the House's Law Enforcement Committee. "Some people have fears about concealed weapons, but since 1995 there has been no escalation in violence, and crime across the state of Texas has decreased."

According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, applicants for concealed handgun licenses must undergo eight hours of classroom instruction, pass a written test and demonstrate shooting proficiency. The state also performs extensive background checks on applicants and requires gun licenses to be renewed every five years.

"There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that allowing concealed carry on college campuses would lead to more problems," said Katie Kasprzak, a spokeswoman for Concealed Campus and a senior at Texas State University.

A little more than half the country supported a complete ban on semi-automatic handguns, according to an ABC survey conducted last April.

"To have more than half the country be in favor of a ban like that goes against the notion that the support for gun control hasn't increased since Virginia Tech," said Doug Pennington, spokesman for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, a national organization that supports stricter gun-control laws. "People

feel just as strongly as ever, and we need to get politicians to pay more attention to this issue."

Seventeen state legislators around the nation proposed bills allowing a call for a lift on campus gun bans, but 15 of those states voted against the legislation, Pennington said.

"Guns on campus is a pretty unpopular idea among students, faculty, law enforcement and state legislators around the country, depending on what state you look at," Pennington said. "That's not very surprising; at the end of the day, I think most folks realize that guns on campus is a step too far."

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