

FACT SHEET



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Oppose Guns in Worship

Bill: HB 23, sponsored by Delegate Wendell Walker, repeals the prohibition on the carrying of dangerous weapons in a place of worship without good and sufficient reason while a meeting for religious purposes is being held at such place. **VICPP opposes this bill for the following reasons:**

Congregations should be allowed to develop their own security plans. Congregations are concerned about security. Most denominations help congregations develop security plans. Congregations have always had the ability to engage whatever security measures they deem appropriate. **No changes in the law are necessary for congregations to protect themselves.**

Security experts **do not** advise allowing random people to carry guns as a means of protecting people. Rather, congregational leaders are trained with appropriate methods. Some congregations hire security guards.

Virginia has a grant program for local law enforcement to work with congregations in developing plans to address religious hate crimes and protect their congregations. VICPP is partnering with congregations and the Prince William Police Department on one such grant.

Worship Spaces are Sacred: People of faith want their sacred worship spaces to be holy, safe, and a refuge. Faith communities across Virginia stand by the belief that houses of worship should be free of violence.

Allowing random people to carry guns does not address security concerns: Some legislators believe that removing this prohibition will address concerns about mass shootings in congregations. It will not.

Indeed, mass shootings in religious settings have increased around the country. According to a VOA News Report, mass shootings, defined as killing of four or more

people, are increasing. From 1966 to 2000, only 1 percent of mass shootings were motivated by religious hate. From 2000 to 2014, 9 percent of mass shootings involved religious hate. That number jumped to 17 percent between 2018 and February 2020. Most congregational shootings are perpetrated by people with a history of racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Christianity and Islamophobia, often with ties to white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups. Others are motivated by domestic disputes with spouses and girlfriends (men are the shooters in congregations, not women).

Allowing random people to carry guns or other dangerous weapons into places of worship without a good and sufficient reason does not protect worshippers. It makes them more vulnerable.

Congregations should have the religious freedom to decide if they want guns or weapons in their worshipping space. The government of Virginia should not be telling congregations what they must do or not do in their worshipping spaces.

Accidents happen with guns. According to the CDC, there are 14,000 to 19,000 nonfatal accidental shootings annually and about 600 deaths from gun accidents. Congregations are concerned that allowing random people to carry guns into worshipping spaces will result in more accidental shootings, especially if guns fall out of purses and children play with them.

Since 1950, both Republican and Democratic Virginia legislators have supported the continuation of the ban on carrying a dangerous weapon to a place of worship without a good and sufficient reason. During 2018 and 2019, the General Assembly defeated similar bills to remove the prohibition on dangerous weapons in houses of worship. This bill should be defeated, as well.