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**Licensed Handgun Carry for  
Young Adults Serving  
in the Armed Forces**

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# **Executive summary**

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This Issue Paper examines a proposal to allow young adults, aged 18-20, to apply for concealed handgun carry permits, if they currently or previously served in the United States Armed Forces. For decades, other states have allowed licensed carry by

young adults. Assertions that licensed carry will increase suicides are implausible, and not supported by data.

## **Colorado law**

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Under current law, a young adult may openly carry a handgun, with no need for a permit. The proposal would allow some of these young adults to carry concealed rather than openly, after meeting the requirements for a concealed carry license.

Under current Colorado law, there are no restrictions on handgun or long gun possession by young adults aged 18-20. Nor are there any special restrictions on open carry of handguns or long guns by these young adults. Under current law, a young adult may openly carry a handgun, with no need for a permit. It has been proposed to also allow some of these young adults to carry concealed rather than openly, after meeting the requirements for a concealed carry license.

The requirements include:

- A finger-print-based background check conducted by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation and by the Federal Bureau of investigation.<sup>1</sup>
- Mandatory in-person safety training by a certified instructor.<sup>2</sup>
- Approval by the local Sheriff, who can deny or revoke a permit whenever there is specific evidence that the individual presents a danger to self or others.<sup>3</sup>

## **Policies of other states**

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Nine states broadly authorize concealed carry by young adults:

- Alabama.<sup>4</sup>
- Idaho.<sup>5</sup>
- Indiana.<sup>6</sup>
- Maine.<sup>7</sup> The statute specifies that military personnel who reside in Maine may pay the lower fee which is applicable to resident applications.<sup>8</sup>
- Montana.<sup>9</sup>
- New Hampshire.<sup>10</sup>
- North Dakota.<sup>11</sup>
- South Dakota.<sup>12</sup> Active duty military personnel and their spouses who have a home of record in South Dakota are considered residents for permit application purposes, regardless of the duration of their residency.<sup>13</sup>
- Vermont.<sup>14</sup>

Idaho's 2016 statute is brand new. Some other state laws are quite old, namely Vermont (1903), New Hampshire (1923), and Alabama (1936). The rest are from 1983-1991.

Five additional states issue concealed carry permits to persons 18-20, but under more limited circumstances:

- Texas. For military personnel only. The 2005 Texas statute is nearly identical to the Colorado proposal.<sup>15</sup>
- Iowa. For professional reasons, such as being a security guard.<sup>16</sup>
- West Virginia.<sup>17</sup> Similar to Iowa.
- Wyoming. Attorney General has discretion to issue, based on Sheriff's recommendation.<sup>18</sup>
- Maryland. Open to anyone 18 or over, but rarely issued.<sup>19</sup>

Although there will always be people who object to licensed carry in general, it does not appear that anti-gun advocates have ever identified—or attempted to identify—

any problems related to the young adult protection laws.

## Suicide

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In Colorado, opponents of young adult licensed carry have raised hypothetical concerns that legal reform will increase suicide. The argument is facially implausible. The proposed reform changes nothing about who may possess a handgun or long gun. The proposal adds one manner in which young adults may carry defensive handguns. The opponents' theory seems to be that a young adult

would not commit suicide with a handgun possessed at home, and would not commit suicide with a handgun carried openly in public, but young adults would commit suicide if the handgun were carried concealed. This is irrational. There is no social science literature which supports such a claim.

## Suicide by gun

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A law about gun possession (rather than about the manner of gun carrying) would raise the issue of suicide. Guns are the suicide method most likely to result in a fatality, although some other methods (e.g., jumping from a height, hanging) are not far behind. All social scientists who study firearms agree that more gun possession results in a higher percentage of suicides being committed by firearm. Social

scientists disagree about whether gun possession affects the total suicide rate. For example, gun possession in Japan is very rare, and so is gun suicide; but the total suicide rate is about double the U.S. level.<sup>20</sup> To the author's knowledge, no social scientist has argued that handgun carry laws have any effect on suicide.

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## Data on military suicides

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Deployment into combat zones appears to have no effect on suicide risk of military personnel. A study which controlled for age, sex, race, marital status, branch of service, and rank, found that deployed veterans had a lower risk of suicide compared with nondeployed veterans.<sup>21</sup> Multiple deployments were not associated with greater suicide risk among deployed veterans.<sup>22</sup>

For active military personnel aged 17-19, suicide is so uncommon that the Department of Defense does not even calculate a rate. For personnel aged 20-24, the suicide rate is about one person out of 5,000. The rate for this age group is similar for most groups of older personnel:

Age	2014		2013		2012	
	Number	Rate per 100,000	Number	Rate per 100,000	Number	Rate per 100,000
17-19	7	-	14	-	10	-
20-24	93	21.7	91	20.9	120	27.1
25-29	72	22.4	73	21.8	90	25.8
30-34	51	23.3	31	14	49	22.1
35-39	29	19.2	26	16.8	32	20.3
40-44	14	-	11	-	11	-

Source: "Department of Defense Suicide Event Report, Calendar Year 2014 Annual Report" ("DoDSER 2014"), table 7, page 20, <http://t2health.dcoe.mil/sites/default/files/CY-2014-DoDSER-Annual-Report.pdf>. (The DoD did not calculate rates for categories with fewer than 20 suicides.)

Military suicides are primarily male. Female military suicide is so rare that

meaningful rates sometimes cannot be calculated:

	2014		2013		2012	
	Number	Rate per 100,000	Number	Rate per 100,000	Number	Rate per 100,000
Male	252	22	239	20.3	297	24.8
Female	17	-	15	-	24	11.7

Source: DODSER 2014, table 7, page 20. Again, DoD does not calculate rates for categories with fewer than 20 suicides.

## Summary of suicide data

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The logic of denying Second Amendment rights based on a 1-in-5,000 suicide risk would equally support banning guns for all male personnel aged 21 or over.

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Ever since the Vietnam War, some people have been claiming that people who serve in the Armed Forces—especially in overseas combat—are profoundly damaged psychologically. The claims are based on prejudice rather than data.

According to the data, suicide rates for military females are very low. The same is true for male personnel aged 18 or 19. In short, the only group of military young adults which has a notable suicide risk is 20-year-old males. Even for them, the

suicide rate is no different than for older personnel: about 1-in-5,000. The logic of denying Second Amendment rights based on a 1-in-5,000 suicide risk would equally support banning guns for all male personnel aged 21 or over.

Again, the suicide issue might be relevant to gun possession, but it has no relevance to a law about the manner of carrying guns.

## The real suicide issue

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In recent years, some extremists (many of whom appear to suffer from untreated mental illness) have been targeting U.S. military personnel within the United

States. Typically, these attacks are murder-suicides, in which the criminal expects to die at the end of the killing spree. Armed Forces personnel have been singled out

for these attacks because of their service to the United States. They are targeted solely because they have already stood up to defend the rest of us. A compassionate, rational government does not deprive

people who defend the nation of the means to defend themselves—particularly when service in the national defense increases the probability that a person will be attacked.

## Concealed carry licenses are highly law-abiding

Persons who are issued concealed carry licenses are far more law-abiding than the general population. One reason is obvious: permittees are a self-selected group of people who are scrupulous about legal compliance. It is very easy to get away with carrying a concealed gun without a permit; other than the illegal removal of the “Do Not Remove Under Penalty of Law” tag from a mattress, concealed carry is one of the most difficult crimes to detect.<sup>23</sup> Persons who apply for a concealed carry permit have chosen to spend a substantial amount of money and time (for fees, training, application, fingerprinting) to get a card from the government; that card legally authorizes the person to do something (carry concealed) which the person could do anyway, with almost no chance of getting caught.

The law-abiding nature of the applicant pool is strengthened by Colorado’s rigorous process for issuing carry permits:

- The background check is biometric (fingerprints) and takes weeks. In contrast, the instant background check for buying a gun in a store uses an identity document (typically, a driver’s license).
- Colorado law requires in-person safety training. So a trainer can refuse to issue a certificate to a person who behaves inappropriately.
- Sheriffs have discretion to deny or revoke permits, based on an individual’s conduct. This can include non-criminal conduct.

Colorado data on Concealed Handgun Licenses are reported annually to the legislature.<sup>24</sup> The reports are available on the website of County Sheriffs of Colorado.<sup>25</sup> In 2009-2013, there were 154,434 permits in Colorado. There were 1,390 permit revocations in this period, including 931 for an arrest. Contrast this with the arrests of over 200,000 Colorado adults in 2013 alone.<sup>26</sup>

Data from other states are similar. Licensees are much more law-abiding, and vastly less likely to commit violent gun crimes, compared to the general population.<sup>27</sup>

Some anti-gun lobbies claim that persons with Concealed Handgun Licenses frequently commit homicide. The factoids come from the Violence Policy Center, a gun prohibition organization in the District of Columbia. When these claims are examined case by case, they do not hold up. For example, cases which were determined by a prosecutor or grand jury to be lawful self-defense were incorrectly claimed by VPC to be criminal homicides. Likewise, VPC sometimes claims that a criminal had a carry permit when there is no evidence that he did. Of the minuscule number of criminal homicides perpetrated by permit-holders, hardly any took place in public, which is the only place a carry permit would be relevant.<sup>28</sup>

Of course it is true that persons with a Concealed Handgun License are more

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Persons who are issued concealed carry licenses are far more law-abiding than the general population.

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likely to engage in a *lawful*, justified shooting. The point of a concealed carry law is that crime victims can defend

themselves. The criminal attacker, not the victim, should bear the risk of injury.

## If open carry is already lawful, what is the benefit of concealed carry?

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Citizens who defend everyone else deserve the right to defend themselves.

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Colorado's Concealed Carry Act is preemptive, so persons engaged in licensed carry have a clear idea about where carry is or is not allowed. Persons with carry permits can take advantage of Colorado's reciprocity agreements with other states, and lawfully carry when visiting or traveling through other states. The mandatory training which is required for Colorado carry permits includes instruction about Colorado's particular

laws regarding the use of force, and other state-specific laws about carrying. Because concealed carry is more discrete than open carry, licensed carriers do not draw attention to themselves.

By encouraging concealed carry, the proposal also benefits people who do not like to see firearms.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

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Citizens who defend everyone else deserve the right to defend themselves. Although some people assert that veterans and concealed handgun licensees are borderline suicide and homicide

perpetrators, government data show the opposite. Promoting licensed concealed carry, rather than unlicensed open carry, promotes social harmony.

# Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Colo. Rev. Stats. §18-12-205(4)(b).
- <sup>2</sup> Colo. Rev. Stats. §18-12-202(5).
- <sup>3</sup> Colo. Rev. Stats. §18-12-203(2) & (3).
- <sup>4</sup> Alabama Code § 13A-11-75. First enacted in 1936. 1936 Ala. Laws, Extra Sess., no. 82, p. 52.
- <sup>5</sup> Idaho Senate Bill 1389 (2016), <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2016/S1389.pdf>. Previously, Sheriffs were allowed but not required to issue permits to 18-20-year-olds. Idaho Code § 18-3302(19). Permits are only necessary for concealed carry within city limits. Idaho Code § 18-3302(3)(d). The 2016 enactment also allows persons 21 and over to concealed carry without a permit, including within city limits. S.B. 1389.
- <sup>6</sup> Indiana Code § 35-47-2-3(g)(3). Enacted in 1983. Indiana Laws 1983, vol. II, no. 311-1983 p. 1895.
- <sup>7</sup> 25 Maine Rev. Stats. § 2003(1)(a). Enacted 1985. 1985 Maine Laws chapter 478, p. 1608. Persons over 21 may be issued licenses, but under 2015 legislation, licenses are not required for concealed carry for persons 21 and over. LD 652, [http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=SP0245&item=1&sn\\_um=127](http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=SP0245&item=1&sn_um=127).
- <sup>8</sup> 25 Maine Rev. Stats. § 2003(18).
- <sup>9</sup> Montana Code § 45-8-321(1). Enacted in 1991. 1991 Montana Laws, ch. 759, p. 2731. No permit is needed for carrying outside of cities and towns. Montana Code § 45-8-316(i).
- <sup>10</sup> N.H. Rev. Stats. § 159:6 (no age limit). The statute has been in effect since 1923. 1923 N.H. Laws, ch. 118, p. 139.
- <sup>11</sup> N.D. Cent. Code § 62.1-04-03(1)(a); 1985 N.D. Laws ch. 683, pp. 2230 (18-year-olds may possess handguns, without parental supervision), 2236 (carry permits “shall” be issued to persons who may legally possess handguns, and who pass training and background check requirements). North Dakota issues a Class 2 permit to 18-20-year-olds. The legal rights of a Class 2 permit are the same as a Class 1 permit within the state; however, the Class 1 permit is recognized by a larger number of sister states for reciprocity purposes.
- <sup>12</sup> S.D. Codified Laws § 23-7-7.1(1). Enacted 1985. 1985 S.D. Laws, ch. 190, p. 367. The “temporary permit” mentioned in the statute is valid for four years. *Id.* at 368.
- <sup>13</sup> S.D. Codified Laws § 23-7-7.5.
- <sup>14</sup> Vermont does not require a permit for concealed carry. This has been the law ever since a 1903 court decision. *State v. Rosenthal*, 75 Vt. 295, 55 Atl. 610 (1903) Persons under the age of 16 may not possess handguns without parental permission. Vermont Stats. § 4008.
- <sup>15</sup> Tex. Stats., Government Code § 411.172(g); 2005 Tex. Laws, ch. 486 (H.B. 322).

- <sup>16</sup> Iowa Code §§ 724.7 (professional permits); 724.8(1) (18 for professional permits; 21 for other). A professional permit is “when the person’s employment in a private investigation business or private security business licensed under chapter 80A, or a person’s employment as a peace officer, correctional officer, security guard, bank messenger or other person transporting property of a value requiring security, or in police work, reasonably justifies that person going armed.”
- <sup>17</sup> W.V. Code. § 61-7-4(a)(3) (“he or she is required to carry a concealed weapon as a condition for employment”).
- <sup>18</sup> Wyoming Stats. § 6-8-104(j) (“under circumstances that a reasonable, prudent person would believe warrant the issuance of a permit to carry a concealed firearm”).
- <sup>19</sup> Md. Code, Public Safety, § 5-306(a)(1) (“an adult”); Md. Code, General Provisions §1-103(a) (“‘Adult’ means an individual at least 18 years old.”). Maryland usually issues permits only to persons who are being threatened by a specifically identified criminal. That said, Maryland allows 19-year-old victims of criminal threats to protect themselves just as 49-year-olds can.
- <sup>20</sup> For a survey of the social science, see Gary Kleck, *Targeting Guns: Firearms and Their Control* (2003), pp. 265-92. Kleck’s previous book on firearms social science, *Point Blank*, was awarded the Hindelang Prize by the American Society of Criminology, for the most significant contribution to criminology in a three-year period.
- <sup>21</sup> Han K. Kang, Tim A. Bullman, et al., “Suicide risk among 1.3 million veterans who were on active duty during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars,” *Annals of Epidemiology*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Feb. 2015), pp. 96-100. The hazard ratio was 0.84. The 95% confidence interval was 0.75–0.95. The hazard ratio is how much a particular variable affects a particular outcome. For example, the lung cancer hazard ratio for people who currently smoke cigarettes is 4.9. For ex-smokers, the hazard ratio is 2.2. In other words, a person who currently smokes cigarettes is 4.9 times more likely to develop lung cancer than is a person who has never smoked. A hazard ratio of 1.0 or less indicates that the variable (combat deployment) does not increase the likelihood of the outcome (suicide). The confidence interval is the range within which it is 95% likely that the results are accurate, rather than being a statistical anomaly.
- <sup>22</sup> *Id.* Hazard ratio, 1.00; 95% confidence interval, 0.79–1.28.
- <sup>23</sup> Colorado’s ban on mattress tag removal was repealed in 1990. 1990 Colo. Session Laws, p.

1319 (repealing C.R.S. § 25-5-308). Governor Romer celebrated by tearing off a tag.

<sup>24</sup> C.R.S. §18-12- 206(4).

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.csoc.org/ccw\\_application.asp](http://www.csoc.org/ccw_application.asp).

<sup>26</sup> FBI, *Crime in the United States 2013*, table 69, [http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u-s/2013/crime-in-the-u-s-2013-tables/table-69/table\\_69\\_arrest\\_by\\_state\\_2013.xls](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u-s/2013/crime-in-the-u-s-2013-tables/table-69/table_69_arrest_by_state_2013.xls).

<sup>27</sup> David B. Kopel, “Pretend ‘Gun-free’ School Zones: A Deadly Legal Fiction,” 42 *Connecticut Law Review* 515 (2009), pp. 564-573, <http://davekopel.org/2A/LawRev/Kopel-School-Zones.pdf>.

Data reporting varies by state. The results are: Minnesota, one handgun crime (including non-violent regulatory offenses) per 1,423 permittees. Michigan, about 1 in 5,000 permittees convicted of brandishing or other handgun misuse. Ohio, fewer than 1 in 200 permits revoked for any reason (including that permittee moved out of state). Louisiana, about 1 in 1,000 permits revoked for gun misuse. Texas, permit holders are 79% less likely than the general population to be convicted of any crime. Florida, per 100,000 permit holders, 27 are convicted of a firearm crime, including regulatory offenses.

<sup>28</sup> Clayton E. Cramer, *Violence Policy Center’s Concealed Carry Killers: Less Than It Appears* <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2095754> (download of full paper available from a link on this page).

<sup>29</sup> A small percentage of this group suffers from a mental disorder known as “hoplophobia.” Philip T. Ninan & Boadie W. Dunlop, *Contemporary Diagnosis and Management of Anxiety Disorders* (2006), p. 107. One might think that “hoplophobia” would involve anxiety about kangaroos and rabbits. The word stems from “hoplite,” a type of citizen-soldier in ancient Greece.

For example, a professor at the University of North Dakota said that she would continue to call campus police when she sees ROTC students carrying rifles, because she is disturbed. “University of North Dakota professor vows to call 911 on every ‘inappropriate’ ROTC drill,” *Washington Times*, Mar. 23, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/mar/23/university-of-north-dakota-professor-vows-to-call-/>.

Hoplophobia is an example a “specific phobia”—that is, a phobia about a specific thing or activity. Among the many other specific phobias are arachnophobia (fear of spiders) or ranidaphobia (fear of frogs). In contrast, a “general phobia” is an anxiety disorder that has many different triggers.

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