SENATE JUDICIARY
EXHIBIT NO. 4
DATE 3/17/09
BILL NO. HB228

March 17, 2009

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I thought it might be helpful to provide to you a summary of the testimony on HB 228 I had prepared to present in your committee today. I appeared before your committee in my capacity as commissioner of higher education and on behalf of the presidents, chancellors, residence hall directors and campus security officers of the Montana University System.

Our overall concern is the increased carrying of weapons, concealed and unconcealed, this bill would promote in our communities where 42,000 Montana University System students are studying. A primary criteria of our students and their families is a safe community in which to study. For the reasons stated so articulately by many opponents in the committee hearing, this bill causes us great concern for the safety of students in our communities.

Another significant factor for Montana as a whole, as well as our recruiting offices, is the perception of safety by students and their families when making the choice of where to enroll or where to start a career or business. A state in which concealed weapons are more plentiful and less regulated is not reassuring to many students, 8500 of which come here and support our communities from out of state.

We are of course very concerned that the policy of the state of Montana, as stated in this bill, might be viewed as extending to our campus residence halls and family apartments. We currently prohibit weapons in the dormitories (except in campus-designated, locked storage areas). Our presidents, chancellors and resident hall directors are adamant that this prohibition is necessary for the safety of our students.

The Board of Regents does have a policy prohibiting firearms on campus except in the hands of security personnel and when stored in designated secure storage areas under campus control. While we understand that the bill does not intend to override the regents' right to secure their campuses, we hope the bill does not pass for the reasons stated above. If it does, we hope it is amended to clarify that it does not apply to the campuses of the Montana University System.

Sincerely,

Sheila

Sheila M. Stearns
Commissioner of Higher Education