

**By Emily Nohr**

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An Omaha state senator thinks that allowing guns in the hands of off duty law enforcement attending school functions could keep Nebraska institutions safer.

At a Feb. 16 Judiciary Committee hearing, Sen. Burke Harr of Omaha said the bill, LB 618, would allow off duty police officers and other members of law enforcement to carry guns to school events, including athletics, dances, proms and school board meetings.

According to the provisions of the bill, the school must have a contract with officers.

Currently, firearms are prohibited from school property unless they are in the possession of some military officials and other authorized law enforcement officers.

Some of Nebraska's largest school districts—like Omaha Public Schools, Millard Public Schools and Lincoln Public Schools—support the bill, Harr said.

The bill's public hearing before the Judiciary Committee also drew support, with five proponents and one neutral testifier.

Brian Hale, the director of communications for the Nebraska Association of School Boards, said he supported the bill, even though he has not surveyed all 253 school districts in the state.

He said his board took its position because of verbal support it has gotten through various school officials, he said.

"This certainly gives some sort of opposition to reduce the damage that could happen," he said.

The bill also gained national support from Jordan Austin, a Nebraska lobbyist for the National Rifle Association (NRA.)

At the hearing, Austin said he was in attendance to publicly express his support for the bill.