



MINISTRY MEDICAL GROUP

Sponsored by Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother

**Testimony of Stew Watson, MD
CEO Ministry Medical Group
Ministry Health Care
Senate Bill 90/Assembly Bill 126
Senate Bill 93**

Thursday, May 12, 2011

Senate Committee on Judiciary, Utilities, Commerce and Government Operations

Good morning, Chairman Zipperer, Dr. Galloway – my State Senator, and other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Thank you for holding a hearing on legislation related to concealed carry. I would like to personally thank my own Senator – my friend and former colleague – Dr. Galloway – for bringing this hearing to the heart of Wisconsin in what I see as a true display of *representative government*. Thank you.

I am Stew Watson, the CEO of Ministry Medical Group – the physician group of Ministry Health Care. I am also a practicing physician of Emergency Medicine at Ministry Saint Clare's Hospital of Weston. Ministry Health Care, in addition to our medical group, includes 15 hospitals, dozens of clinics, and affiliated health services including Home Care. We are the largest rural health care system in the state of Wisconsin, covering a vast geographic area, including service to patients in Minnesota and the UP. We employ nearly 12,000 individuals, and are a significant part of not only Wisconsin's health care community, but also the economy of our great state.

On behalf of Ministry Health Care, I am testifying For Information Only on the legislation, but in support of specific language that appears in the bills. We ask that as you and your legislative colleagues negotiate the details of the bills before passing them into law, that you retain two key points in the bill(s).

First, we support the posting authority. Allowing a business – including a business that provides health care – to post that concealed carry is not allowed on the premises is something we would activate at Ministry Health Care sites. Ministry Health Care has one hospital in the state of Minnesota, a state that also allows posting procedures. We have not experienced any problems at our hospital in Minnesota. We believe the posting provision is sound and urge you to maintain it.

Second, we support the ability of an employer to restrict concealed carry. At Ministry Health Care, our own employed and contracted security personnel do not carry firearms. From a safety and culture perspective, we want to maintain firearm-free health care facilities.

If exemptions for specific businesses are added, we would support the addition of "Health Care Facilities" as an exempted business. Without an exemption, we feel the posting and employer language in the bill drafts may be sufficient for us, our employees, and the patients and families we serve 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

There are any number of reasons why concealed carry should not be allowed in a health care facilities, but today I am focusing on three.

1. Access Restriction

A health care facility, such as a hospital, usually has multiple public entries. If visitors were allowed concealed carry, we would need to restrict access (likely by closing access points) and install equipment and personnel at a specific access point. This would be an inconvenience to our patients, employees, and to any visitors including family members trying to visit someone in a hospital.

2. Expense

Securing access points with magnetometers, security screeners and added personnel would add a significant expense, which would be built into the cost of health care, which ultimately gets passed along to the consumer. We are, as a health care provider, constantly seeking ways to *decrease* the cost of delivering health care. We do not want to add costs.

3. Potential danger

a. In rural health care, we serve all, ranging from neonatal to geriatric, from trauma to palliative care to behavioral health. In health care situations, particularly those that are emotionally-charged, such as an emergency or end-of-life situation, human emotions can escalate quickly and can pose a risk to our patients and providers. This is something we experience every day in our hospitals, even without the presence of concealed firearms. Adding firearms to these emotionally volatile situations would be extremely dangerous.

b. In addition to the emotionally-induced dangers, firearms in a hospital can be a threat due to the high presence of combustibles and flammables in a health care setting. This includes, but is not limited to equipment, oxygen.

There are more reasons why we do not want to see concealed carry in health care facilities, but these three, and our support of posting and employer restrictions best summarize the position of Ministry Health Care on the proposed bill(s).

Senators, thank you for taking time to listen to my testimony today. Again, I appreciate your time and attention to this important issue. I welcome any questions from you, either now, or as you continue to contemplate the legislation.