Dear Senator,

We, the signed below, represent the leadership of the employee groups at Keene State College and are writing to share our concerns regarding House Bill 334, an act that diminishes the state’s right to prohibit or regulate firearms, firearms components, ammunition, or firearms supplies.

As we understand it, the bill has three separate sections; the first defines the body that has the authority to regulate gun and ammunition sales, ownership and carry laws. The third defines the application of the bill and clarifies that this bill supercedes other ordinances, regulations, rules and policies.

It is the second section of this bill threatens the safety of our constituents and sustainability of our college campus community. This section states that “No public or private entity shall prohibit the possession of firearms on any property owned, in whole or in part, by the state, or an agency, political subdivision, committee, or other governmental unit thereof, unless expressly authorized in statute.” It is our understanding that the sponsors of this bill developed it with the belief that allowing guns on campus will enhance individual safety.

In 1999 the National Safety Council statistics on gun related deaths recorded 3,385 children and youth ages 0-19 years were killed with a gun. This includes homicides, suicides, and unintentional injuries and amounts to about 9 deaths per day. Those deaths break down to: 214 unintentional, 1,078 suicides, 1,990 homicides, 83 for which the intent could not be determined, and 20 due to legal intervention. Of the total firearms-related deaths, 73 were of children under five years old, 416 were children 5-14 years old and 2,896 were 15-19 years old (or within the college-age population). Clearly these numbers suggest that greater access to guns would reduce rather than increase safety.

Some of us support historical philosophies around gun ownership; however, we do question how this bill supports or provides for a “well-regulated militia,” which we believe is the purpose set forth in the Constitution. Additionally, we believe that there are financial implications to this bill that have not been considered, which is particularly important given the recent budget cuts to the University System of New Hampshire:

- **Costs of a Campus Police Force:** Currently, the safety needs of our campus are met through a professional Campus Safety department. These highly trained individuals work closely with the Keene Police Department to enforce the law, protect the safety of the campus, and promote community through proactive interventions and programming. However, our Campus Safety Officers are not armed and do not have arrest powers. If our students (or visitors to our campus) are permitted to come to campus armed, it seems only logical that we need to move to a Campus Police Department. Rough estimates for increased costs of personnel, training and equipment quickly reach an additional $250,000 per year on a campus that has just absorbed a 55% cut in State funding.

- **Children on Campus:** One of the ways in which the College keeps costs low and supports our regional community is to host outside programs in our facilities. Many of these programs center on children and are often related to school activities such as the regional “Geography Bee.” The Safe Schools Act would make it impossible to host these events and would terminate an important funding stream. In addition, the College has a nationally accredited child care center on campus which not only supports the child care needs of the Monadnock Region, but also serves as a best practices laboratory early childhood education center for our Methods students and Student Teachers. This program would need to be discontinued as well, creating a deficit in our Education Program and in quality, affordable childcare in the region.
Psychological Disorders and Suicide: The Virginia Tech shooter had a significant history of mental health issues, and college campuses across the nation have seen a rise in students with a range of psychological disorders. In addition, college students have long been a high risk group for suicide; fortunately, Keene State College has implemented a successful identification and prevention program. Allowing guns on campus could provide easy access to students during times of personal crisis. It may not be the gun owner who uses the gun in a “shooting” incident or for suicide, but a roommate or friend who knows of and gains access to the gun. Firearms account for the highest proportion of suicide deaths at 50.7%.

Alcohol and Drugs: For better or worse, the college years are often characterized as a time for experimentation, which may include potentially risky behaviors. Keene State College has policies and educational programs in place to assist students in legally and safely exploring their own values, establishing their identities, and making decisions as adults; however, issues with alcohol and drugs on almost every college campus are well-documented. Alcohol and drugs can impair a student’s ability to make decisions. We recently experienced a situation off campus where an intoxicated student accidentally shot another student and then killed himself in a panic when the police arrived. Had the student not had access to a weapon, the accidental shooting would not have occurred, and even if an alcohol-related incident of another kind had occurred, the police would have had a better opportunity to intercede with the student, and our community could have provided support.

Conflict Resolution: Currently, our residence halls are staffed with unarmed professional and paraprofessional staff who manage the majority of conflict resolution. The majority of this mediation occurs around minor community violations and interpersonal conflict. These individuals are trained to empower students through deliberative dialogues to work with peers to create supportive living and learning communities by expressing their needs and developing creative compromise. These are honest and open conversations, but are often characterized by strong emotional reactions that take careful negotiation skills to navigate. Working through these situations in a safe and supportive environment prepares our students for their lives after college. One of the most important qualities of these conversations is that there is a balance of power needed to come to successful resolution. A student who is in possession of a gun forever changes the power dynamic, not only for other students involved in the conflict, but also for the staff.

Classrooms and Programming: We encourage the free exchange of a wide range of ideas in formal and informal settings. We create programs and bring in speakers to broaden the world view of our students. The spaces where these programs occur must be physically and psychologically safe spaces. The threat that another member of the community could bring a gun into a challenging discussion would certainly derail important educational experiences. Our campus is also a very open campus. We pride ourselves on being a resource to the Monadnock region and invite all residents of the area to utilize our library, meeting spaces, and to take full advantage of our programming. We deeply value this openness and connection to the greater community, but allowing guns on campus would create vulnerabilities that may, by necessity to establish a safe learning environment, result in a more closed and insular campus.

Maintenance: Our maintenance staff is called upon at all hours to complete repairs in our facilities. They are well trained in appropriate ways to announce their presence; however, it does happen that even after taking steps to ensure that students are aware, a maintenance staff member accessing a room startles a student. A surprised student in possession of a weapon could make a rash decision and cause irreparable harm. Our maintenance staff will always have this as a possible threat lingering as they simply try to complete their basic job responsibilities.

Campus Policies and Accidents: A campus community is different than a home. Our students live in large residence halls of up to 400 students, often with two or more roommates. We have designed rules
and regulations to attempt to ensure student safety and encourage wise choices. These policies would be unnecessary in a home. Our residence hall communities do not allow candles or halogen lamps because one small accident could have catastrophic outcomes for hundreds. We limit the amount of alcohol a 21 year old student can bring into a community to foster wellness and limit underage student access to alcohol. These same rationales apply to guns on campus. A shooting of any kind would be a tragedy and while a policy may not prevent all potential shootings, we know that banning guns from student rooms significantly curtails the potential for accidental shootings.

We encourage you to think critically about this bill. It is not as simple as an interpretation of our Constitution and the protection of individual rights. In this situation the needs of the community outweigh the perceived rights of an individual. A campus is a complex collection of diverse individuals, representing a wide range of developmental stages, in unique living and learning environments. This requires us to think differently about the interaction between individual rights and community responsibilities.

We ask, as you determine your vote on this bill, that you consider the student living in a room with someone they’ve just met — and how they might feel about sharing their needs around balancing an atmosphere conducive to their social development, sleep and study with a student who has a gun; consider the undergraduate Resident Assistant charged with mediating the roommate conflict that occurs between the roommates; consider the unarmed Campus Safety Officer wondering what he or she might face while knocking on a student room door to confront a policy violation; consider the maintenance staff member called to do a repair and even after carefully announcing their presence, they startle a student who has a gun; consider the faculty member who is charged with discussing a controversial or emotional topic in a classroom when a student walks in with a loaded weapon; and consider the administrator or faculty advisor meeting with a student who has failed academically and not knowing if that student might take out their disappointment on them.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

Dr. Patrick Dolenc
President, Keene State College Education Association

Michael McCarthy
President, Keene State College Adjunct Association

Timothy Garland
Chair, Operating Staff Council

Kimberly Schmidl-Gagne
Chair, Professional/Administrative/Technical Staff Council