

Guns not the answer

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THE ISSUE

Beginning today, new firearms laws take effect in Alabama allowing residents to openly carry handguns.

The odds of the person in the car next to you at the traffic signal is carrying a concealed handgun will be much greater beginning today.

A loosening of state laws earlier this year by the Legislature gives residents greater leniency in carrying weapons.

One of the more controversial aspects of the changes is that employees may now store loaded weapons in their cars where they work, which was opposed by the Business Council of Alabama.

The changes also allow people to openly wear a handgun in public — a bad idea under any circumstance.

The loosening of concealed carry and open carry laws comes in the wake of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in December, where a gunman killed 20 children and six teachers. Though the school was locked, the gunman shot through a door to gain entrance.

The reaction, unfortunately, has been an arming of teachers in some states and making it easier for residents to carry concealed weapons. More guns, especially in classrooms, is not the answer to the problem.

Allowing more people to carry handguns, especially openly, could lead to more violence. Some could feel emboldened to take the law into their own hands.

Arms makers, the National Rifle Association and others have painted a picture of the United States as a crime-ridden nation in which it isn't safe to go out your front door unarmed. Muggers, thieves and criminals of every imaginable description, they say, are lurking on every corner and behind every bus, making it necessary to be armed for a simple trip to the grocery store.

Crime statistics paint a very different picture of the United States. Violent crime has been on the decline for years, including crimes committed with firearms. The phenomena of school shootings is a new development, but in almost every case they involve an unstable person who has either legally obtained a firearm or gotten one from a family member.

An armed citizenry can do little to intervene in these tragedies.

A greater investment in school resource officers who are part of local law enforcement agencies and greater investment of mental health counselling would do more to prevent another Sandy Hook than all

the handguns in America.