



BILL HASLAM
GOVERNOR
STATE OF TENNESSEE

April 24, 2015

Dear Lt. Governor Ramsey and Speaker Harwell,

Today I signed House Bill No. 995 into law. Given the considerable attention this issue has received, I am writing you to explain my reasoning and to ask that we work together to monitor the implementation of this new law in our local communities.

As you know, I have expressed concerns about changing the law to remove local control of locally-owned parks, in part because I know community leaders have the best sense of the specific activities taking place in their parks as well as the unique conditions that exist in and around those areas. Some of the most sensitive situations state and local leaders must consider are those activities involving school children. Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-17-1309 prohibits guns on property owned or in use by schools or higher education institutions. However, the original version of HB 995/SB 1171 authorized guns in all parks without clarifying that the general prohibition on carrying guns on property in use by schools would continue to apply in parks.

Our administration raised the need for clarification of this issue during the legislative process, and it received additional discussion on the floors of the Senate and the House as local school boards weighed in with concerns. To the sponsors' credit, they were receptive to these concerns, and the final version of the bill made clear that guns are not allowed at school-related activities taking place in parks.

Overall, I believe the legislation in its final form is a vast improvement from the bill as initially introduced. However, I am concerned that an unintended consequence may be operational challenges for local leaders in managing their parks in a safe, effective and consistent manner, due to events and situations that could not have been anticipated in drafting this law.

I think it is critical going forward that we work together with local leaders to assess the impact of this law and that we all listen and respond to the questions and concerns of those leaders as they work to implement it successfully.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Haslam".

Bill Haslam
Governor

cc: Senator John Stevens
Representative Mike Harrison