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By VICTORIA CALDERON and ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

Recently, the state of Kansas passed legislation that grants residents with a concealed carry license the ability to legally bring guns into public buildings – such as libraries, city halls and county administration buildings – unless adequate security measures are taken, such as metal detectors at every entrance to a building.

This new law will go into effect July 1. However, some county and city governments are seeking to temporarily exempt themselves from falling under its jurisdiction.



The exemption lasts six months, and will expire Jan. 1, 2014. During this time, local governing bodies do not need a security plan in place. However, they must use the exemption time to submit on a security plan for their buildings to the state. Public buildings must have security systems set up in order to establish it as a gun-free zone; otherwise, the new law allowing concealed weapons will be applied to the building.

Four-year exemptions are also available, once the six-month exemption is over, if plans are still not finished.

The commission of the City of Liberal has decided to apply for a six-month exemption. However, the legislation will be discussed at length at the next commission meeting.

As for the cost of securing the public buildings, the city would have to pay at least \$3 million for security if the exemption is not granted.

Mayor Dave Harrison hopes that six months is long enough for the law to be changed.

“I think it’s something unnecessary, and I also think that the measures that are in place are about as good as they can get,” he said. “They’ve served well for years and years. Unfortunately, a few tragedies sparked this kind of fear more than anything else, and I think it’s probably an overreaction to that fear.”

The Seward County Commission has likewise chosen to apply for a six-month extension. The issue was added to the board’s agenda Monday evening, and administrator April Warden outlined the commission’s options on the new law.

“Most commissioners have been notified today through (the Kansas Association Counties) that House Bill 2052 was signed into law on concealed carry,” she said. “You can allow actual conceal carry in public buildings if you so choose.”

Warden said with the July 1 decision deadline rapidly approaching, the county and other local boards have been put in a rush to discuss a policy and which buildings concealed weapons will be allowed in.



The administrator said most counties have therefore chosen to write a letter to the office of Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt to ask for an extension to allow entities to consider issues about the new law.

“They are requesting that we look at the City of Wichita in Sedgwick County, as they initiated their own review of public buildings back in 2012,” Warden said. “They did an evaluation where they went through and looked at safety elements such as presence of alcohol being in some places, children or sporting events being in some places.”

Warden said through this process, Wichita officials justified conceal carry bans in some buildings while allowing those weapons in other facilities.

“They went through all their public buildings and decided if there were children or activities that could be involved or if there’s alcohol that could be involved, they didn’t want to allow conceal carry in those places,” she said.

Warden said this does not mean that entities must look at what was done in Wichita, but she and others did feel it was a good idea to look at a county such as Sedgwick that has taken the steps there to make the decision about the conceal carry law.

“What I am proposing to you tonight is that I will draft a letter to the attorney general’s office if you would allow the chair to sign it just asking for a six-month extension so we can actually meet and discuss on this and set our policy and decide what we want to do for each of our public buildings,” she said to the county commission Monday.

County commissioner Jim Rice said he also believes drafting a letter to Schmidt’s office is a good idea.

“This is something we don’t want to rush into,” he said. “We operate several buildings that have completely different activities. I think we need to take a serious look at it and evaluate what we

need and what we like.”

Warden said the plan for the six months includes getting comments from the public, including sheriff Bill McBryde. She added the letter to the attorney general is a simple one.

“It just says at our commission meeting, pursuant to Section 2 of Senate Substitute for House Bill 2052 approving the exemption of the following buildings to the requirements of said bill, they ask that we list each building and address on the letter and just sign it,” Warden said.

The letter also includes a section that requires the county to state that it understands the exemption would end on Jan. 1, 2014, unless further action is taken by a governing board such as the county commission.

“The House and Senate chairs of the Federal and State Affairs Conference Committee agreed to a stipulation that recognizes local expertise in determining which public buildings may prohibit licensed concealed weapons,” Warden said. “They’re allowing you a four-year exemption for all public buildings. In six months, if you don’t feel like you’re comfortable, you do have time that you can also request another extension, but for now, I’m just asking you to do a six-month extension.”

The commission voted unanimously to allow Warden to draft a letter to the attorney general requesting a six-month extension signed by chairman Ada Linenbroker.

When it comes to school systems, the new legislation comes into an entirely different category. The law only requires that schools post signs stating that they do not allow concealed weapons. In Wichita, the school board is voting to take this action and make their schools gun-free.

As for USD No. 480, the schools are already prepped with all the required necessities. Superintendent Paul Larkin stated, “Really, we don’t have to take any action because the law gave us the exemption – as long as we just post that we’re not going to allow conceal carry. Our signage is in place, and so we’re probably ahead of the game. We’re going to just continue with that status quo for the time being.”

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