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Lawmaker wants concealed weapons in churches

by Karin Hamilton by Religion News Service

Days after a fatal shooting at an Illinois megachurch, an Arkansas lawmaker said she plans to make a second try to pass a bill allowing concealed weapons in churches.

"I have received numerous e-mails and phone calls concerning this wanting me to bring this back, none against it," State Rep. Beverly Pyle, a Republican, told Little Rock CBS affiliate KTHV.

The bill, which Pyle originally introduced on Jan. 29, would remove churches from a list of locations where people licensed to carry concealed weapons can't bring guns.

The bill passed through the House of Representatives but died on a voice vote in the Senate Judiciary Committee on Feb. 25, according to the Associated Press. There were only two votes for the measure, and Pyle needed five.

Pyle is making changes to the measure -- including removing a clause that would require churches to post a notice on whether they allow guns on their property -- and plans to take it back to the committee next week, according to KTHV.

Pyle thinks some senators may vote differently this time around after a gunman fatally shot the Rev. Fred Winters in the pulpit of the First Baptist Church of Maryville, Ill., just outside St. Louis.

State Sen. Hank Wilkins, a Democrat, told KTHV he may change his vote from no to yes.

"In light of the shooting yesterday I think there will be a number of legislators who will want to reconsider this," Wilkins said.

State Sen. Robert Thompson, also a Democrat, is still unsure about his vote.

"I haven't made up my mind to be honest with you. I think Rep. Pyle made a good argument that the current law violates separation of church and state. If it were a cleaner bill I might be able to vote for it," Thompson told KTHV.

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