The Virginia Tech killings in April served as a grim reminder, not just to those in higher education but also to lawmakers, of what could happen on almost any college campus.

"You're always thinking about how you can do things better," said Jeffrey D. Duncan, a state representative in South Carolina. "So when I saw that, I wondered, 'Could that happen here?'"

Mr. Duncan, a Republican, responded by drafting legislation designed to prevent a similar event. In doing so, he joined dozens of officials around the nation.

In the three months since Seung-Hui Cho went on a rampage at Virginia Tech, politicians in at least 25 states have considered new laws or policies designed to protect college students.

Some have waded straight into the gun-control debate, by either proposing bans on guns on campuses or, conversely, drafting measures intended to ensure the presence on campuses of people with the firepower to stop a killer. Several governors have taken a more muted approach, by creating committees to study campus safety.

The measures have met with mixed reactions and have reignited a debate that tends to flare whenever mass murders occur, over what sensible steps a government should take to prevent them.

**Stopping Shooters**

In South Carolina, Mr. Duncan has touted the benefits of responsible gun ownership, arguing that an armed person probably could stop a murderer such as Mr. Cho. Accordingly, he offered a measure that would have cleared the way for permit holders 21 and older to carry concealed guns on campuses.

Mr. Duncan said he was "inundated with e-mails and phone calls probably about 4 to 1 in favor of the bill," but the measure failed anyway. It died after becoming saddled with controversial amendments, including one that would have required gun owners to leave their weapons in their cars. Mr. Duncan said he would try to revive his measure in the second year of South Carolina's two-year legislative cycle.

Stavros S. Anthony, a member of the Nevada System of Higher Education's Board of Regents, an elected body, has also proposed allowing some faculty and staff members to carry concealed guns on campuses.

Under the proposal put forth by Mr. Anthony, faculty and staff members could volunteer to become reserve police officers. After undergoing 21 weeks of training at a cost of $3,500 per person, they would return to their campuses armed to take on potential dangers.

"If an active-shooter situation occurs, they're in a position to kill the bad guy," said Mr. Anthony, who is also a captain in the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

The board has asked campus police chiefs to take the basic framework proposed by Mr. Anthony and develop a final plan for consideration by the board at its meeting in August. But some of the state's college
faculty members argue that guns have no place on campuses.

Mental-Health Concerns

Lawmakers in at least six states, including Louisiana and Maine, have taken the opposite tack, seeking to toughen gun-control laws.

In Maine, State Rep. Sean Faircloth, a Democrat, proposed giving information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation about mentally ill people who are hospitalized involuntarily after a court hearing, to help keep guns out of the wrong hands. Mr. Faircloth called the measure "a positive step" that "would have increased public safety," and it had the backing of the National Rifle Association -- a rare distinction for a gun-control bill.

The measure eventually reached Gov. John E. Baldacci's desk, but before the Democratic governor could sign it, the Legislature voted to withdraw the bill, citing conflicts with a federal law about the reinstatement of gun-ownership rights. After the bill was recalled, though, Mr. Baldacci issued an executive order to create a system similar to the one proposed by Mr. Faircloth. It would report people found by a court to be either not guilty because of insanity or incompetent to stand trial.

The Louisiana measure, which sought to ban guns in dormitories, did not fare as well and was voted down in a committee.

Unshifting Opinion

Despite the flurry of legislative activity inspired by the Virginia Tech killings, a poll by the Pew Research Center has found that the incident did little to alter most Americans' views about gun control.

Why, then, have so many lawmakers attempted to pass legislation? Kristin A. Goss, an assistant professor of public-policy studies and political science at Duke University, said elected officials can sometimes capitalize on heavy news-media coverage of such tragedies.

"Some sort of sensational event, whether it's a shooting or something else, will usually move something up the legislative agenda," she said.

Another Approach

The governors of at least five states, including New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin, have weighed in with task forces instead of legislation.

Gov. Jim Doyle of Wisconsin, a Democrat, created his state's task force in May. One of the duties of the group, which includes representatives of most of the state's colleges and universities, will be examining ways to identify students with the potential for dangerous behavior.

Bruce Shepard, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay and one of the organization's co-chairs, said the rates of mentally ill students on college campuses are "skyrocketing."

Mental health is also a focus in California, where a commission approved $60-million for expanded mental-health services for students, including those in college. The commission, led by State Sen. Darrell Steinberg, a Democrat, is financed by a 1-percent tax on millionaires.

"The tragedy did bring to light the fact that, just like in a larger society, mental-health services on college campuses are not what they should be," Mr. Steinberg said.