

**Testimony before the  
Senate Judiciary Committee**

**Susan Castillo, Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**February 8, 2012**

**SB 1550**

Good afternoon Chair Prozanski and members of the committee. For the record, I am Susan Castillo, Oregon's Superintendent of Public Instruction.

I'm pleased to join you this morning to testify in support of Senate Bill 1550.

As Superintendent of Public Instruction, I am responsible for the leadership and general supervision of the state's 197 school districts.

The bill before you proposes to make our schools the safe places we all expect them to be, by prohibiting concealed firearms and other dangerous weapons on school grounds. I think most people already think that guns and weapons are not allowed in schools or on school grounds.

Following the Columbine and Thurston shootings, the school community took a hard look at the safety of our schools. As a result, federal law, state law, and school policies, were strengthened.

We've worked hard to send a message to students, teachers, and the community that schools are safe places to be. We have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to guns. We've worked hard to create a school culture that rejects violence and rejects weapons.

But there's a loophole: holders of concealed weapons permits may carry loaded guns into our children's schools. Senate Bill 1550 works to close that loophole, and that's just common sense.

I'm not anti-gun. But we are talking about places where kids are. We need to be thoughtfully cautious.

Opponents will argue that we don't need this bill — that there has been no rash of shootings in schools. I think back to what we all wondered after the Thurston shootings: How could we have prevented this? What

could we have done differently? I don't want to wait until something happens involving a concealed handgun. We need to look at this issue now.

Opponents will argue that they have a right to carry weapons anywhere, including schools, yet we already prohibit the carrying of concealed weapons at many public places and employers may prohibit their employees from bringing guns to the workplace.

If Wells Fargo, courthouses, and the Salem Shopping Center Mall can ban concealed handguns in their workplace, shouldn't our school staff feel equally safe in their workplace?

If the Portland Trailblazers can ban concealed guns, shouldn't high school basketball games be free of concealed guns as well? Why would we have a lower standard of safety for our school children than we have for the Portland Trailblazers and their fans?

We spend a lot of time talking about improving schools and how to fund these improvements. This proposal would cost nothing, and would yield

a big benefit: A consistent message to our students that they mean the world to us and we will do everything we can to keep them safe.

Prevention of school violence will require multiple strategies: the intolerance of bullying behavior, the effective use of school resource officers; buildings that are designed with safety in mind; and students who are educated as to how to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways.

The elimination of concealed handguns in schools is just one strategy to provide the safest school environment possible, but because guns pose the most potential lethal risk, their elimination should be at the top of our list.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important safety issue for our kids.