



CEASEFIRE oregon

April 5, 2013

Judiciary Committee
Oregon Senate

Re: Ceasefire Oregon Supports SB 700

Dear Chair Prozanski and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today in support of SB 700, a bill that adds private firearms sales to the list of transactions requiring a background check. It is worth noting at the outset what background checks do—they verify that the individual purchasing a firearm is not legally prohibited from doing so, that he is not, for example, a felon, a domestic abuser, or dangerously mentally ill.

It is not known exactly how many guns are transferred in Oregon each year without background checks, and of those, how many are transferred to prohibited persons. One national estimate, based on a 1996 study, is that 14–22% of firearms are obtained in private transactions from persons who are not required to conduct a background check (and are not family members).¹ In Oregon, that percentage would be slightly lower because background checks are required for all transactions at gun shows, including private sales.

Of the 259,513 firearms background checks performed in Oregon in 2012, only 465 (or 0.18%) were requested by private parties (i.e., not by licensed dealers), and 388 (83%) of those checks were requested by private parties at gun shows, where background checks are mandatory. Since 2000, any private gun seller in Oregon who is not required to conduct a background check may nonetheless voluntarily request one from the Oregon State Police. Yet, only 77 voluntary background checks were requested by Oregon gun sellers in 2012.²

Extrapolating from the estimate that 14–22% of gun transfers occur through private parties, a reasonable projection is that 40,000–75,000 guns were transferred privately in Oregon last year, and that less than 1 in 500 included a background check. It is indisputable that the voluntary private background check system has been widely ignored by gun owners reselling weapons.

It is also perfectly obvious that private sellers regularly offer, and often require, no background check on the transaction as an explicit condition of sale. In just a few minutes on a single Internet gun sale website, Armslist.com, we pulled up 113 pages of guns for sale by private parties in Oregon in a 90-day period. These are not transfers to family members, they are sales to strangers.

It takes only a few keystrokes to narrow the offers to those selling or buying only “FTF” (face-to-face), i.e., not through a licensed firearms dealer, who would require a background check. Most private sellers required Oregon IDs and bills of sale, to protect themselves from any liability for the transferred weapon, but they eagerly offered to sell without the background check that would protect the rest of us if the buyer is a felon, a domestic abuser, or dangerously mentally ill.

Solid evidence shows that requiring background checks for private gun sales saves lives.³ Fourteen states already require background checks for all handgun sales. In those states:

- Gun trafficking is 48% lower than in other states.⁴
- The rate of women murdered by an intimate partner with a gun in 2010 was 38% lower than in other states,

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while the rate of those murdered by other means was nearly identical.⁵

- The firearm suicide rate was 49% lower than in other states, even though suicide by other means occurred at almost the same rate.⁶

There is every reason to expect that similar reductions in gun death rates—actual lives saved—will occur in Oregon following the enactment of SB 700.

Lastly, we note that proposals to expand background checks to cover all gun sales enjoy extraordinary public support. A January 2013 poll shows that over 80% of Oregonians support universal background checks on all gun sales.⁷ National polls show support for universal background checks at around 90%.⁸

Ceasefire Oregon respectfully urges approval of SB 700.

Respectfully submitted,



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Elise Gautier
President, Ceasefire Oregon

1. Estimates are based on study by Philip J. Cook & Jens Ludwig, *Guns in America*, 1996, available at <http://www.policefoundation.org/content/guns-america>, which found that 30–40% of guns were obtained from private sources in a sample group, and a subsequent analysis of the data that found that 14–21% of guns were purchased without background checks, after intra-familial transfers were excluded. More research is needed to accurately determine how many guns are transferred privately, but the gun lobby has blocked such research in recent years.

2. Data from the Oregon State Police, March 2013.

3. This research was conducted, and the results provided, by Mayors Against Illegal Guns.

4. Daniel Webster, Jon Vernick, & Maria Bulzacchelli, "Effects of State-Level Firearm Seller Accountability Policies on Firearm Trafficking," *Journal of Urban Health*, July 2009.

5. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Supplementary Homicide Reports, 2011.

6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2005) [cited 2012 Dec. 20].

7. Elway Research, Jan. 29–31, published by *The Oregonian* at http://media.oregonlive.com/politics_impact/other/OREGONIAN%20GUNS%20TOPLINE_wm.pdf

8. See, for example, <http://news.yahoo.com/over-90-percent-americans-support-gun-background-checks-133548844.html>. Polling by Republican Frank Luntz for Mayors Against Illegal Guns found that 82% of gun owners—including 74% of National Rifle Association members—support requiring criminal background checks for anyone purchasing a gun.