

Written Testimony Regarding SB700

April 5, 2013

Dear Chair Prozanski and Committee Members:

My name is Kate Merrill and I reside in Tigard. I am a member of the Citizens' Coalition for Social Justice and our all-volunteer group has been working on reasonable solutions to gun violence for several months. I would like to preface my statement with a few statistics you may or may not be aware of:

According to The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) data,

- Between November 1998 and December 2011, Oregon obtained 2,125,099 background checks, an average of about 151,000 per year.
- Between January and November of 2012, a total of 222,795 background checks were conducted for those 11 months alone for an increase of 47.5%.

According to an online article by Virginia Alvino, OPB | March 04, 2013 2:22 p.m. | Updated: March 04, 2013 4:04 p.m. <http://www.opb.org/news/article/gun-related-deaths-in-oregon-on-the-rise/>

- 12% of gun-related deaths from 2011 and 2012 were related to homicide. Over half of those occurred in the home, and most were disputes between partners.
- Stranger violence is much less common. Especially in public spaces. Shootings connected to robberies, gangs and drugs each account for about 5% of homicide.
- The vast majority of gun-violence deaths are the result of suicide. 83%.

Background checks protect our rights and they protect our families. For many people, gun ownership is a part of their everyday lives. They use guns responsibly and we know from experience how easy background checks are.

It's the people who don't get a background check we should worry about. Right now, criminals and the mentally ill have access, no questions asked, to the 6.6 million guns sold every year without a background check. Why? Because we have a loophole in our laws that requires a background check if you buy at the gun store or at the gun show but not private sales or on the internet.

Proposed changes to background checks legislation create a tool, not an obstacle, for gun owners to responsibly exercise their rights. As the owner of a firearm, responsible gun owners don't want to transfer their gun to someone who would use it irresponsibly. But without a background check, it's hard to tell if someone they want to sell their weapon to is dangerous or not. The last thing a responsible gun owner would want is to transfer a gun to someone who will do harm with it.

Background checks legislation will fix that. It will make it easier for you and me to exercise our Second Amendment rights. It's a simple, fair, and fast system– but provides peace of mind to gun owners and to the communities they care about. And it's not going to result in anyone registering or taking guns away. But it could save the lives of those who use guns for suicide.

Please consider moving this legislation forward for a vote. This is a simple and reasonable solution to close the background check loophole here in Oregon. Don't miss this opportunity to keep people safe and give responsible gun owners peace of mind.

Thank you.