



To:  
The Honorable Floyd Prozanski  
Senate Judiciary Committee

Subject:  
SB 1551, Requires person to request criminal background check before transferring firearm to any other person. Specifies exceptions to background check requirement for family members, inherited firearms and antique firearms.

February 6, 2014

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I am a physician in the Department of Pediatrics at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), and a member of the Oregon Pediatric Society (OPS). Today, I would like to offer my strong personal support and the support of the OPS for SB 1551. We feel that this legislation is crucial to protect Oregon's children from gun violence.

My first job as a pediatrician is to protect children and adolescents from harm. And the greatest threat to kids today is not infection or cancer, but injuries. Firearm-related injuries continue to rank among the top 3 causes of death for US youth. According to CDC data, gun violence accounted for 6,570 deaths among Americans under the age of 24 in 2010 alone. That is an average of 18 gun-related deaths among America's youth every day, which is a death toll on the same magnitude as the 2012 disaster in Newton, Connecticut. And just like those lost in the Newtown tragedy, each of these gun-related deaths among our youth are preventable.

The American Academy of Pediatrics believes that the absence of guns from children's homes and communities is the most reliable and effective measure to prevent firearm-related injuries in children and adolescents. I am not here today to promote the AAP's overall stance, which would call for more drastic reform, but rather to request that we take a common sense step to prevent gun ownership among dangerous individuals living in the same communities as our children. As a pediatrician, I believe we need to advocate for every reasonable legislative action that can help make our children safer from gun-related injuries even if it cannot completely eliminate that risk. And I am not alone in my professional opinion as universal background checks for gun purchases are endorsed by The American Academy of Pediatrics, The National Physicians Alliance, and the American Medical Association.



A law that requires criminal background checks before the transfer of guns between private parties would help to decrease the needless gun violence facing our youth by preventing firearms from slipping into the hands of individuals who would misuse them. In an investigation performed by the group Mayors Against Illegal Guns, researchers found that 1 in 30 buyers on a major online gun exchange would have failed a background check, if one was required. In passing SB 1551, Oregon would take an important step by limiting access to guns among those who perpetrate violent criminal acts, commit homicide or suicide, or traffic guns to others with sinister intentions.

As a pediatrician, I know firsthand that the death of a child causes an unknowable sadness for that child's family and their community. The tragedy of that loss is intensified in cases of gun-related deaths, because we know that such injuries can be prevented. In our current system, even when the appropriate safety and screening measures are taken for privately owned guns, tragedies can still occur. Our system is flawed, and needs to be changed. The tragic gun deaths that have taken place in our state are preventable, and if there are steps we can take to make Oregon safer to any degree for our youth, we need to do it. Increasing the surveillance of gun transfers that occur here in our state is an important step in that direction.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you might have.

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