



Oregon Public Health Association

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Health Association

To: Senate Judiciary Committee
From: Jessica Quarles, BA, BSN, MPH
Oregon Public Health Association Member
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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1551

Chair Prozanski, and members of the committee, my name is Jessica Quarles. My address is 2111 SE Elliott Ave, Portland, Oregon 97214. I am a nurse and a public health professional. I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Oregon Public Health Association in support of SB 1551.

Founded in 1944, OPHA is an affiliate of the American Public Health Association. OPHA has over 500 members spread across every county in the state. We are health educators, doctors, nurses, researchers, professors, community leaders, and citizens who are committed to improving the health of every Oregonian.

As we debate this issue in Oregon, it is important to remember that gun safety is not only about rights and responsibilities; it is also a public health issue.

The U.S. is unique among high-income countries for its high rate of gun violence. Oregon ranks number 23 among the states for rate of gun fatalities, slightly higher than the national average.ⁱ The statistics are tragic. Since 2009, firearm fatalities in Oregon have exceeded traffic fatalities. In 2009, we lost 377 people to traffic accidents and 417 to firearms. In 2011 we lost 331 people in traffic accidents and 421 to firearms.ⁱⁱ Each year, the vast majority of these firearm deaths were suicide.

As we know, the personal and emotion toll of gun violence is tremendous, and so is the societal cost. The APHA reports gun violence in the U.S. resulted in estimated cost of \$174 billion in 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ Lessons learned from other public health issues such as tobacco cessation and motor vehicle safety show that comprehensive approaches can save lives. To have similar success in reducing gun violence, we can and must implement consistent policies to keep our communities safe. States that have more comprehensive firearm legislation also have lower rates of firearm fatalities.^{iv} We must close the loophole that allows those at high-risk of self-harm or harm to others access to firearms without a background check.

The Oregon Public Health Association (OPHA) supports Oregon Senate Bill 1551, which closes the background checks loophole. This is a critical step to reducing injury and stemming the tide of gun fatalities in Oregon. While efforts like background checks are often rightly framed as 'common sense,' we believe these actions are also good public health policy.

Thank you, Senators, for your service to Oregon and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

ⁱ Oregon's has 11.4 deaths per 100,000; US average is 10.1 per 100,000. Data here: <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/firearms-death-rate-per-100000/>

ⁱⁱ Data from Oregon Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes Quick Facts. Accessed here:

http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TDATA/car/docs/2011_QuickFacts.pdf

http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TDATA/car/docs/2010_QuickFacts.pdf

http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TDATA/car/docs/2009CrashSummaryBook_Web.pdf

Firearm Fatality Data:

Shen X, Millet L, 2012. Violent Deaths in Oregon: 2010. Oregon Health Authority, Portland, Oregon. Accessed here: <https://public.health.oregon.gov/diseasesconditions/injuryfatalitydata/pages/nvdrs.aspx>

Shen X, Millet L. 2013. Violent Deaths in Oregon: 2011. Oregon Health Authority, Portland, Oregon.

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/InjuryFatalityData/Documents/NVDRS/SummaryDataTablesByYear.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Children's Safety Network Economics and Data Analysis Resource Center at Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. (2012). Miller TR, data analyst. *The Cost of Firearm Violence*. Calverton, MD: <http://www.childrensafetynetwork.org/publications/cost-firearm-violence>.

Accessed 4 February 2013.- Cited in APHA's Gun Violence Prevention Issue Brief. Access here: <http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/214B37EC-B3A7-4A2B-A501-AEE178AD533E/0/APHAGunViolenceFactSheet3182.pdf> Accessed December 9, 2013

^{iv} Fleeger et al. (2013) Firearm Legislation and Firearm-Related Fatalities in the United States *JAMA Intern Med.* Published online March 6, 2013. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.1286