

Written Testimony of Paul Kemp,
Before the Senate Committee on Judiciary, Oregon State Senate
Hearing on SB 941

Thank you Chairman Prozanski and the members of the Committee, for holding this important hearing and for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you.

My name is Paul Kemp. I'm a gun owner and I enjoy target shooting with my son. I am a strong supporter of the Second Amendment and I also believe in sensible gun laws, like SB 941.

I am here to speak on behalf of my sister Carla, and her late husband Steve Forsyth, who was shot in the back of the head and murdered at the Clackamas Town Center Mall on December 11th, 2012, by a gunman armed with a Stag-15 rifle and 150 rounds of ammunition. I would also like to point out that on the Stag Arms website, their product details note that the Stag-15 is "made to mil-spec standards". My hunting rifles are not made to military specs, **they don't need to be, they are hunting rifles.**

I want to tell you a little bit about the person that Steve was, and about how his death has impacted my sister and their children. Steve was a good man, a loving husband, a good son, a good friend, a businessman a caring dad who made time to coach basketball and football in West Linn Youth Leagues. My last memory of Steve was a 16th birthday celebration for my son. It was a magical celebration and when I look

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back at the photos from that evening, I see the fun we all had that night. However, I also have to look at those photos through tears, as that was last time most of us saw Steve alive.

Just two days later, on December 11, 2012, Steve was at the Clackamas Town Center Mall putting the final touches on a kiosk where he planned to sell custom-made wooden coasters for the holiday season. That afternoon, I received a call from Carla that no brother should ever have to receive from his sister. Carla was calling from the mall, she was hysterical and crying telling me that there had been a shooting at the mall and that she couldn't contact Steve. I immediately left work and headed to the mall, only to wait with her for another five hours before learning that Steve had been shot in the back of the head and murdered in the shooting. Days later, we had a private viewing for Steve and one of the most heart breaking memories from that day was watching my nephew Alex go up alone to say good bye to his father. My son Nathan went up to put his arm around Alex to support him and it broke my heart to see how much those two boys had to grow up that day.

I share these deeply personal moments with you because I want you to know what gun violence does to families all across the state and to say to you that you can help reduce gun violence by supporting SB 941. Steve's death has devastated his family. I help take care of my sister and her kids the best I can. When I look at my younger sister Carla it pains me to know that she has lost her soul mate and the father of her children..

I am here today because I am determined that something good will come from Steve's death. I am also here today because I cannot accept a society where it is

“normal” for a high school to do a lockdown drill – as my son’s high school did on March 17th, St Patrick’s Day. Or, because my daughter, who is about to become a licensed teacher here in Oregon, was taught how to take down an active shooter as a part of her student teacher training just weeks before. The Clackamas County Sheriff Deputy showed the teachers how they should grab the end of the rifle barrel and point it towards the floor. The deputy was demonstrating that by grabbing the end of the rifle barrel, the teacher had a very good leverage advantage and could control where the gun was aimed. This deputy also told the teachers that if their students could not flee the class room, then they should attack the shooter with whatever they could, books, sharp pencils, while the teacher hung onto the end of the gun barrel.

I cannot accept this reality when there are clear steps that each of you can take as our legislators to prevent dangerous people from getting guns in the first place.

It has been more than two years since Steve’s death and this is now my third year that I have come before this committee to testify in support of background checks legislation. I hope that you will make it my last by passing SB 941. **No one has died from a background check.**

When I was attending public schools and college I never had to do a “practice lockdown\lockout drill”. I would like to ask all of Oregon’s legislators in the House and Senate, how many of you practiced active shooter drills during your days attending elementary, middle and high school? **I bet the combined answer is zero.** How many Oregon legislators who are former school teachers, school administrators or college

professors had to do practice lockdown\lockout drills? **Again, I bet the combined answer is zero.**

We need to do everything to make sure our kids and teachers are safe in their schools and that means doing more to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people in the first place. The most effective way to do that is by passing SB 941 and requiring background checks on all gun sales.

Some argue that because this bill wouldn't eliminate gun violence, we shouldn't pass it. To those critics I say: we have car safety equipment like seatbelts, ABS brakes and air bags even though seatbelts, ABS brakes and airbags do not prevent all auto accidents. Should we remove car safety equipment? The rational answer is No!

Some will argue that we do not need more gun laws and that more gun laws will not stop all gun violence. To those critics I say: We have laws against murder, rape and robbery, those laws do not stop all of those crimes. Does that mean we should remove them from the books? Again, the rational answer is No!

Some argue that background checks are a burden. But as a gun owner who has been through several background checks, I can tell you that a background check only takes 90 seconds and 94.6% of Oregonians live within 10 miles of a gun dealer. What's more, the public supports this bill. 81% of Oregonians support requiring background checks on all gun sales.

If this bill saves even one life, spares even one family from going through what my family has gone through, then it is worth it. And we know that this bill will save lives. How do we know that? In states that already require background checks on all

handgun sales – states like New York, Iowa, Colorado, and 14 others – 46% fewer women are shot to death by intimate partners and 48% fewer law enforcement are shot to death with handguns.

I am more hopeful than ever that you will take action this year and pass this life-saving bill. It breaks my heart that gun violence victims, such as my brother-in-law Steve, will not benefit from the passage of SB 941. But it gives me comfort to know that with the passage of SB 941, our schools will be safer, students and teachers can focus on learning instead practicing active shooter drills. And Law enforcement officers will be much safer too. **Please vote in favor of SB 941 for the benefit of students, teachers, law enforcement, overall public safety, and for gun violence victims who can no longer speak for themselves.**