

To: Members of the House Rules Committee

From: Sarah Finger McDonald, Corvallis, OR

Re: Testimony in Favor of SB 941

Chairwoman Hoyle and members of the committee:

My name is Sarah Finger McDonald. I live in Corvallis. I am the mother of two children, ages 9 and 4. I am an academic advisor and instructor at an Oregon university. I am also a volunteer with Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America.

Our children are our most precious gifts and their care is our greatest responsibility. It is our duty to create communities where children and families can thrive free from gun violence. It is our duty to do everything we can to prevent the violence that took the lives of 4,083 Oregonians between 2003 and 2012 (an average of 408 people each year, more than 1 each day)¹. It is your duty as elected public servants to pass SB 941, common sense legislation that will save the lives of Oregonians while preserving their rights.

Expanding background checks reduces crime and saves lives. It is not “gun control” legislation; it is crime control and suicide prevention legislation. It will save the lives of law enforcement officers and reduce aggravated assaults with firearms². Between 1980 and 2014 more than half of the Oregon law enforcement officers who were shot to death were killed by people who were prohibited from possessing firearms³.

82% of the Oregon gun deaths Oregonians between 2003 and 2012 were suicides¹. We have all seen the news stories about gun suicides in Oregon outpacing traffic deaths. We are doing a poor job of keeping guns out of the hands of people who would compulsively hurt themselves. States that require background checks on all gun purchases have a gun suicide rate 49% lower than states that do not require background checks on all purchases² whereas the rates of non-firearm suicide do not differ. Passing SB 941 and closing the private sale loophole, including online sales, will help reduce gun suicides in Oregon. SB 941 would save lives and save families and communities from the grief of dealing with the aftermath of suicide.

Preventing suicide is an issue I care deeply about. A classmate I attended school with from kindergarten through high school shot and killed himself. He was a gifted student, a skilled athlete, and an accomplished musician and writer. Unfortunately in his early 20's he also faced mental health issues and drug addiction. He went through in-patient treatment and was living with his family and continuing treatment when he killed himself. I firmly believe that this friend and many others like him would be alive today if they did not have access to a gun in a moment of crisis. SB 941 will make that access more difficult and allow more people to live through a crisis and obtain help.

In Oregon, 60% of the homicide victims murdered by intimate partners between 2003 and 2012 were killed with guns⁴. Research has also shown that when a gun is present in a domestic violence situation, the risk of a homicide occurring increases 5x. Guns increase the risk that a woman will be killed and that her children will lose their mother. Once again, background

checks are a common-sense way to reduce these tragic deaths. In states that require background checks on all gun sales, 38% fewer women are shot to death by their intimate partners². 38% fewer families lose their mother, sister, or daughter.

SB 941, by making it more difficult for criminals, domestic abusers, and the dangerously mentally ill to buy guns, will reduce deaths in Oregon. It will not keep law abiding Oregonians from purchasing guns. Anyone who can pass a background check will still be allowed to buy a gun after completing a background check at one of the 1,471 licensed gun dealers in Oregon. Licensed gun dealers have been performing background checks in Oregon since 1989 and background checks have been required at gun shows since 2000. In 2013 alone the background system blocked 3,982 gun sales to prohibited people⁵. The few minutes it takes to perform a background check results in fewer lives lost to gun violence and fewer families and communities left to grieve.

SB 941 is a common-sense solutions can help decrease the gun deaths in Oregon. It is time to close the private and online sale loophole.

Thank you.

1. Oregon Public Health Division. Firearm Fatalities in Oregon, from 2003 to 2012. <http://public.health.oregon.gov/>. Web. 30 March 2015.
2. Mayors Against Illegal Guns. Evidence that Background Checks Work. 2013. <http://bit.ly/1d08n5b>. Web 30 March 2015.
3. Everytown analysis of FBI Law Enforcement Officers Killed or Assaulted, 1980 – 2013. See: <http://1.usa.gov/1q6CZ84>.
4. Oregon Public Health Division. Homicide Trends and Characteristics, Oregon 2003-2012. <http://public.health.oregon.gov/>. Web 30 March 2015.
5. Everytown for Gun Safety analysis of FBI data, February 12, 2014.
6. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, available at <http://1.usa.gov/1zTVB6A>. Data is for FFLs with a type 1 or type 2 license.