



April 22, 2015

Rules Committee  
Oregon House of Representatives  
Re: Ceasefire Oregon Supports SB 941

Dear Chair Hoyle and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of SB 941, a bill to add most private firearms sales to the list of transactions requiring a background check. This simple step will verify that the individual purchasing a firearm is not legally prohibited from doing so—that she or he is not, for example, a felon, a domestic abuser, or dangerously mentally ill.

We estimate that 38,000 to 62,000 guns were transferred privately in Oregon last year<sup>1</sup> in addition to the 233,878 firearms<sup>2</sup> transferred by licensed dealers and by private parties selling at gun shows. In only 153 of those 38,000 to 62,000 transactions did the seller elect to request a background check through the Oregon State Police. The voluntary private background check system has, obviously, been widely ignored by gun owners reselling weapons.

Ceasefire Oregon does not know how many of those privately transferred guns went to prohibited purchasers; neither do the sellers. A low estimate, using the 38,000 figure and the rate of 0.07% background check denials by OSP last year, would be 266 guns sold privately to felons, abusers, or mentally ill purchasers by gun sellers who voluntarily chose to remain ignorant about the buyer's criminal history.

It is likely that the figure is much higher, because prohibited buyers go to the unregulated marketplace, where background checks are not required. A recent study using data from a national survey of state prison inmates found that nearly all (96.1%) offenders who were legally prohibited acquired their guns from a supplier not required to conduct a background check.<sup>3</sup> In Oregon, those suppliers are private individuals selling guns at places where background checks are not required.

In addition, the passage of Washington's background check law in 2014 is expected to drive even more prohibited purchasers to Oregon's unregulated private market as long as our state remains the only one on the West Coast to allow gun sales without background checks.

Finally, background checks are simple and effective. During 2014 alone, Oregon's background check system prevented 1,590 prohibited persons from purchasing guns from licensed dealers and at gun shows (Oregon State Police data). Background checks save lives. Please support SB 941.

Thank you,

Penny Okamoto  
Executive Director, Ceasefire Oregon

1. The precise number of guns that are transferred in Oregon each year without background checks is unknown. One national estimate, based on a 1996 study, is that 14-22% of firearms are obtained in private transactions from persons who are not required to conduct a background check (and are not family members). (Phillip J. Cook and Jens Ludwig, *Guns in America*,

1996, available at <http://www.policefoundation.org/content/guns-america>, which found that 30-40% of guns were obtained from private sources in a sample group; a subsequent analysis of data found that 14-21% of guns were purchased without background checks, after intra-familial transfers were excluded.) In Oregon, that percentage would be slightly lower because background checks are required for all transactions at gun shows, including private sales.

Of the 233,878 firearms background checks performed in Oregon in 2014, only 153 (or 0.065%) were requested by private parties (i.e. not by licensed dealers), and 360 (or 70% of private party checks) were requested by private parties at gun shows, where background checks are mandatory.

2. Data from the Oregon State Police, March 2015.

3. Katherine A. Vittes, Jon S. Vernick, and Daniel W. Webster, "Legal status and source of offender' firearms in states with the least stringent criteria for gun ownership," *Injury Prevention*, 2013 Feb;19(1):26-31.

<http://www.injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/19/1/26.abstract?sid=e5b439d8-15e8-4913-9085-eb303da51901>.