



POLICE DEPARTMENT

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**Testimony in Support of SB 525B  
House Judiciary Committee  
June 1, 2015**

Chair Barker, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Steve Bellshaw, and I am a Deputy Chief of Police for the Salem Police Department. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 525B. This bill is of critical importance to the safety of domestic violence victims in Oregon. This bill is also critically important to law enforcement officers and prosecutors and our ability to keep victims safe and hold offenders accountable for their behavior.

I have served as a police officer and detective for over 25 years and founded my department's Domestic Violence Response Team. I train officers on Violence Against Women crimes across the state and across the nation as a law enforcement consultant.

**Guns and Domestic Violence are a dangerous combination.** We see this on a daily basis in Salem and in Marion County as a whole. A 2004 survey found that more than one third (36.7%) of female victims reported having been threatened or harmed with a firearm. In nearly two thirds (64.5%) of the domestic violence households that contained a gun, the intimate partner had used the firearm against the victim, usually threatening to shoot or kill her. These statistics are echoed in our caseloads. These relationships are based not on mutual respect but on power and control. The person with the gun has the control.

Since 2013, Marion County has experienced six domestic violence fatality incidents resulting in seven deaths. Five of those incidents involved firearms. Most recently, in August of 2014, Cassandra Wagner was shot and killed in her home outside Salem by her former live-in boyfriend, Jason Clifford Down. She had a restraining order that had been upheld after a hearing that was in place at the time of the murder.

**Guns and Domestic Violence are a dangerous combination not only for victims but also for law enforcement officers.** Domestic violence cases calls are among the most dangerous calls that law enforcement officers respond to. While law enforcement deaths have been going down for the last 40 years, deaths in responding to domestic violence calls have held steady – these calls continue to be lethal for officers. 97% of law enforcement deaths due to domestic violence are by firearm. We saw this in Oregon most recently with the tragic death of Reserve Police Officer Robert Libke, who was shot in the line of duty by an armed man who had a history of domestic violence.

**Senate Bill 525B is narrowly tailored to fill a critical gap in Oregon law.** The bill will provide Oregon law enforcement and prosecutors with an additional tool to protect the safety of victims and hold offenders accountable. While federal law has addressed the well-documented connection between firearms and domestic violence-related homicides for decades by criminalizing possession of firearms by certain domestic violence offenders, no similar provisions exist under Oregon law. Consequently, local law enforcement lacks the jurisdiction or authority to act when offenders, subject to qualifying protective orders or convicted of misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence, possess firearms. Our federal law enforcement partners, while they do a great job, have little day-to-day contact with victims or perpetrators, and are not responding to domestic violence calls in our communities. SB 525B would create a state law mirroring the federal law, which would fill this gap and allow Oregon to better protect victims of domestic violence from gun violence.

SB 525B will protect victims, hold batterers accountable, and help local law enforcement. It will assist in reducing the number of domestic violence fatalities in Oregon. I urge your support, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Steven Bellshaw  
Deputy Chief of Police  
Salem Police Department