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**From the Desk of
Representative
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Guest Opinion

I am proud to have joined my colleagues in the Oregon State Legislature to Co-Chief Sponsor SB 525, a bill that will protect women's lives by restricting their abusers' access to guns. This bill is an important one and it is one I care about deeply.

I worked in law enforcement for 30 years with the Gresham Police Department and was honored to serve as Police Chief for my last six years. During my time in law enforcement the domestic violence cases I worked on had a profound impact on me. I knew I wanted to do more to protect the women and children who find themselves facing domestic violence.

In the early '90s, I formed a special unit in Gresham dedicated solely to investigating domestic violence crimes. I wanted to make sure that not only were there trained detectives in the unit to put criminals behind bars, but also advocates who could help survivors recover from their abuse and bring their attackers to justice. Many of the cases I worked on are chilling, but would likely not have ended so tragically if the attacker did not have easy access to a firearm.

Senate Bill 525 addresses this very issue and helps protect survivors, their families and our community. The statistics around domestic violence and firearms are concerning:

- In 2014, Multnomah County had the highest rate of domestic violence related fatalities and 83 percent were caused by firearms
- 60 percent of all domestic violence homicides in Oregon each year are caused by a firearm
- Firearms caused 87 percent of all deaths in homicide-suicide incidents relating to domestic violence
- In homes where there is a history of domestic violence and guns are present and accessible, it is 20-times more likely to result in a homicide

These statistics are alarming and they underline the reasoning behind Senate Bill 525. This bill would allow a person access to firearms who is subject to a restraining order that was continued after a hearing, and where the person had actual notice and an opportunity to be heard by a judge. It would also prohibit firearm possession by a person convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence; most felons are already restricted from access to firearms.

It is important to note that Senate Bill 525 is not a new concept. In the mid '90s, the Violence Against Women Act added these protections to federal law and this bill means Oregon law will provide the same important protections. Senate Bill 525 will also go a long way in protecting our law enforcement officers who are responding to a volatile situation. In fact, when police officers respond to a domestic violence call and firearms are present the risk of harm to police officers increases. *In states with laws restricting access to guns by domestic violence offenders there are significant decreases in domestic violence related homicides, in some cases by nearly 20 percent.*

Bottom line, Senate Bill 525 will mean that those who have been determined judicially to be perpetrators of domestic violence cannot possess firearms as a matter of state law. If a weapon is within reach of an abuser, the risk of homicidal violence is extreme. This bill gives the criminal justice system a tool to directly reduce this risk and save lives.