

April 16, 2017

TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary
Senator Floyd Prozanski, Chair
RE: SB 868, Extreme Risk Protection Order – PLEASE SUPPORT

Dear Chair Prozanski and honorable members of the committee,

My name is Tanya Tompkins. I am a resident of McMinnville, Oregon and I teach at Linfield College. I have been involved in suicide prevention efforts in Yamhill County and across the state over the past decade. Oregon's rate of suicide has been higher than the national average for 30 years now and over the past 15 years we have seen a 20% increase, with two Oregonians dying by suicide every day.

My students and I were among the first to evaluate a gatekeeper-training tool called QPR (Question, Persuade and Refer) in community and college/university samples (Tompkins & Witt, 2009; Tompkins et al., 2010). In a nutshell, just like CPR attempts to save lives by training everyday citizens how to identify someone who is suffering from a breathing or cardiovascular crisis and intervene until EMT assistance arrives, QPR aims to equip individuals with the tools to know how to intervene in a suicidal crisis and help the person to seek professional mental health care. While this and other tools help to address suicide, they are inadequate alone. Suicide is a serious public health problem that requires a comprehensive prevention strategy that includes mean restriction.

I strongly believe that the passage of SB 868 will save lives by removing guns temporarily from individuals who clearly demonstrate they are a danger to themselves and others. It acknowledges a gap in current law that allows concerned family members, as well as peace officers, to take action in a crisis and save lives. The highest rates of suicide in Oregon are among white men and veterans. In large part, this is due to the fact that when they are in a suicidal crisis they have access to firearms. Given the lethality of self-inflicted gun shot wounds, few survive these attempts. This is the major reason why we see higher rates of attempts in women (who typically select less lethal means), but higher suicide deaths among men.

It is a widely held myth that someone who is intent on dying by suicide will simply find another way to die. These beliefs lead to an attitude of, " why bother with laws that restrict firearms or barriers that prevent suicidal individuals jumping from bridges." The reason to bother is that means restriction works. The "British Coal Gas Story" provides one of many examples. Up until the first half of the last century Brits used coal gas to heat their homes that, owing to the high levels of carbon monoxide produced, provided a quick and lethal method of suicide. "Sticking one's head in the oven" became so common in Great Britain, that by the late 1950s it accounted for nearly half of the nation's total suicide deaths. With the switch to natural gas in the early 1970s the national rates of suicide dropped by nearly a third and has remained close to that

reduced level ever since. Studies of survivors of other lethal means (guns, bridge jumpers) suggest the same thing. In a suicidal crisis one's mental outlook is drastically narrowed and there rarely, if ever, is a "plan B". If one can introduce time and any other barriers between him/her and their "plan A" you can save a life. Over 90% of individuals who survive typically lethal attempts (gun shots, Golden Gate bridge jumpers) do not go on to die by suicide.

HB 868 empowers families and public safety officers to make sure that a lethal "plan A" is out of reach of an individual who is in the midst of a suicidal crisis. Those who might argue that this is an infringement on their second amendment rights seem to fail to appreciate that the right to own a gun is not unlimited, nor is this right immune to reasonable government regulations. This bill is a common sense regulation, restricting gun access for a limited time and preserving due process for reinstatement of gun rights.

Thank you for your time, consideration and voting in support of this bill which will undoubtedly save lives.

Kind regards,

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