

Monday, April 17th, 2017

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Elaine McKenzie, I am a retired public health nurse and a member of the Board of Directors for Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility. I am here today to testify in support of Senate bills 797 and 868.

I was a public health nurse in Alaska for nearly 30 years before moving to Portland in 2005. My work in Alaska as an expert direct service public health nurse working with families in their homes and in Well Child and Family planning clinics showed me firsthand the extreme consequences that violence has on families and a community's overall health and wellbeing. Suicide and homicide create lasting trauma and loss that stunt a community's livelihood and growth. It is frustrating as a public health nurse to identify high risk situations and to know that a fire arm injury to a young child, a suicide of a young man or the homicide of a mother by her intimate partner is preventable. The public health framework has been immensely successful in reducing death and disability from infectious diseases, automobile accidents, unsafe food, and more. Health professionals agree that gun violence is a public health emergency, and therefore it is time to use the public health framework to protect the lives of Oregonians.

The vast majority of gun fatalities in Oregon are suicides: 83% of gun deaths. Suicide attempts are more successful when the person in crisis has access to a firearm. FBI data shows that firearms have been sold to nearly 59,000 criminals and other prohibited people. The evidence suggests that Senate Bills 797 and 868 will save the lives of Oregonians and move us closer to being communities that have eradicated the public health crisis of gun violence.

I urge you to heed the wisdom of public health professionals and support Senate Bills 797 and 868.

Elaine McKenzie, RN, MPH
Board of Directors
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility