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February 11, 2021

To: [House Health Care Committee](#)  
Representative Rachel Prusak, Chair

Re: [HB 2510](#) – Relating to safe storage of firearms – Support

The League of Women Voters of Oregon supports the active role of government in the prevention of gun violence. We applaud the intent of HB 2510, as we agree that saving lives begins with changing the behavior of gun owners who store or transfer their firearms in a negligent manner. Unsecured firearms have already caused too many tragedies in our state, and it is time Oregon joined the eleven other states that have already enacted safe storage laws. Our support is also based on the proven track record of these laws. Multiple peer-reviewed studies link child access prevention laws to reductions in child-involved unintentional shootings, juvenile suicides, and juvenile use of firearms for criminal activity.

Although the penalties for violations in HB 2510, ranging from minor fines to civil liability, are not as strong as those in several other states, we agree that deterrence and a change in behavior should be the primary goal, not criminal liability. The lost and stolen provision of the bill is well-intended, but we would support additional legislation to better address the issue of gun trafficking. We do support the basic safe storage concept, however, and are pleased to see such a broad coalition of supporters on the bill.

The public health crisis of gun violence has become even more dire due to a constellation of factors related to the Covid-19 pandemic, including economic distress, deteriorating mental health, and social isolation. The closure of schools and many businesses have caused children and teens to be left unsupervised for long periods and domestic violence victims to be trapped at home with their abusers. Gang-related shootings have become all too common in cities across the nation, including Portland. At the same time, we have seen a huge increase in gun purchases, with first-time gun owners accounting for a high percentage of the increase. The result of all these factors is that 2020 was a record-breaking year for gun-related deaths in the US. According to the Gun Violence Archive, more than 41,500 people died by gun violence in 2020, and of that number, more than 23,000 died by suicide, an almost 25% jump from 2019.

A frequent argument against safe storage legislation is that gun locks and gun safes prevent quick access to a firearm in an emergency. However, the marketplace has already met the need, and now gun owners have a wide array of “quick access” gun safes and gun locks to choose from. Just like other consumer safety laws, such as those for seatbelts, child car seats, and medicine bottles, the goal of safe storage requirements is to prevent harm and save lives.

According to Giffords Law Center, gun access is the most significant factor in a state’s overall rate of suicide and in the likelihood a domestic abuse victim will be killed. We believe that most gun owners understand the importance of safe storage. This bill is for those who need an incentive to change behavior that can result in tragedy—the tragedy of a child accessing a gun and causing injury or death, of a teen committing suicide with a parent’s gun, or of a domestic abuse victim being shot by an abuser with easy access to an unlocked gun.

The League supports the safe storage concept and urges passage of HB 2510. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.

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