



**Date:** April 21, 2021  
**To:** House Rules Committee, Chair Smith Warner and Members  
**From:** Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations  
**RE:** *SB 554A-20 [Gun safety in public buildings and secure storage of firearms]*

It is my honor to testify in support of SB 554A with the dash A20 amendments on behalf of OEA's 41,000 members. This bill as amended will give public officials, including educators, more tools to help keep our schools safer and will ensure community safety through responsible firearm security.

First, to the secure storage issue.

This concept would ensure that all gun owners practice safe and secure storage protocols that many already do. By making sure that children do not inadvertently find and handle unsecured weapons, tragedies will be averted. By making sure that potentially suicidal people do not have easy access in an impulsive moment of grief and confusion, we will have the opportunity to save lives and offer help. By ensuring that would-be murderers – domestic violence offenders, mass shooters, and others – do not have the ability to steal or borrow weapons, we will protect entire communities from violence and death.

Because our schools and higher education institutions have become sites of tragic gun violence in recent years, our members want this bill to become law. You have of course heard of the massacre at Thurston High School, and the shootings at Umpqua Community College – both of which took the lives of some of our members – but what you undoubtedly do not know is that weapons come to school with increasing frequency, and it is not uncommon for even elementary schools to experience lockdowns to avert incidents and keep our students safe. These frequent incidents do not even make the news anymore, they have become, except during the pandemic, so common.

Add to that the trauma that our students and staff confront when they must participate in active shooter drills several times each school year. Our youngest children plan for their own safety and the survival of their classmates, all the while absorbing a steady diet of trauma in this preparation. Our educators envision how they will act, perhaps to die, to save their kids. Too many have had to deploy these skills in real crises across the nation.

This bill should have passed in 2019 or 2020. Now, Oregon has been given a third chance to be safer by your actions this session. We urge you to not let another year go by without protecting our people.

With respect to the underlying bill, which has come over from the Senate, OEA has advocated for this common-sense legislation to enable entities to create gun-free zones since 1999. And in that time, school and post-secondary campus violence has escalated, year after year. Once we fully return to universal in-person education, we fear that gun-related tragedies, stalled only because of campus closures, will once again be on the rise. Given the dramatic increase in pandemic-timed gun transactions in the state, now is the time for the Oregon Legislature to finally enact this policy.

We believe that SB 554A addresses a school district's need to keep staff and students safe from violence and accidents in schools. This proposal does not invoke a statewide mandate; it is simply permissive, allowing sensitive environments such as education institutions, airports, and the like to keep weapons off their premises if they choose to do so.

In recent years, gun safety lapses by licensed concealed handgun carriers have resulted in near tragedies on school property. Often, these incidents don't even make the news because they have become so routine.

Some examples:

- One handgun was found by a student in a school restroom, left in a stall by its owner.
- Another incident occurred in Portland when a parent came to school for a conference with a teacher but ended up in an altercation in the parking lot with another non-school person.
- In 2018, according to the Associated Press, more than 30 publicly reported mishaps had been reported involving firearms brought onto school grounds. Guns went off by mistake; were fired by "curious or unruly students"; or were left unattended in bathroom stalls, locker rooms, and elsewhere on school premises.\*
- An accidental shooting even occurred when a police officer demonstrating gun safety practices to students inadvertently discharged his weapon and put a bullet through the wall at a middle school.

In addition to preventing unintentional tragedies, schools and colleges have even more cause to support gun-free campuses: some insurance companies have refused to cover schools in which even school security personnel are armed. Clearly, the insurance market understands the elevated risk to the school community.

To be clear, this bill will no more stop an active shooter than do laws on the books that make assault and murder felony crimes. But our laws communicate our values to our people: if we value safety in public spaces, SB 554A tells otherwise law-abiding Oregonians that there are some places their guns should not go because the risks are too great.

We urge you to move this bill with the dash A20 amendment to the House floor with a do-pass recommendation. Thank you.

**\*OregonLive.com, May 5, 2018: "Adults misplaced, mistakenly fired guns taken to school, AP finds"**