

Members of the Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to request that you vote against Senate Bill 554 (SB 554). I oppose the bill on four accounts. First, the bill violates the shared value of bodily sovereignty. Second, the bill grants too much power to unelected officials. Third, the bill seeks to address a problem where none exists. Fourth, SB 554 targets innocent people. I will address each of these points below.

Bodily sovereignty, or self-ownership is a value that is shared across the political spectrum, though distinct groups apply the concept to issues differently. Stated broadly, self-ownership means one has a right to control what happens with one's body. The authors of this bill are likely familiar with bodily sovereignty in issues like reproductive rights. Others advocate for sovereignty to decide which intoxicating substances to consume or whether to consume them at all. SB 554 might not seem to relate to self-ownership at first, until one considers the purpose for carrying a concealed firearm. Firearms are used defensively between 500,000 and 3 million times per year, depending on the estimate. In the overwhelming majority of these cases, no shot is fired, no one is harmed and the incident may not be reported to law enforcement or make the news. In some of these instances, the potential victim was faced with life-changing bodily harm or death. Instead of becoming a victim, the person used a gun to tell the would-be criminal, "No, you will not assault or kill me. This is my body and you will not violate it." Self-ownership doesn't vanish when someone enters a public building. Perhaps proponents of SB 554 can acknowledge that it raises bodily sovereignty concerns and withdraw the bill.

Although I appreciate the notion of local control when determining policy, SB 554 would allow unelected bodies, such as hospital administrators, private school boards, and university staff to initiate a rule that would be enforced as a felony offense. Unlike elected legislators, the bodies mentioned above are not accountable to the people that use their services. Why should school board members have the power to craft law on their property? That power is rightfully vested in the Oregon legislature, elected by, and accountable to the people.

SB 554 is a solution in search of a problem. Current law allows Concealed Handgun License (CHL) holders to carry their firearm in the locations mentioned. According to the Crime Prevention Research Center's (CPRC) 2019 data, Oregon has 276,607 CHL holders, that's 8.26% of the adult population. If concealed firearms were a problem, that problem would be detected at places where large volumes of people are present.

Let's explore this idea further by using Portland Airport (PDX) as a test case. According to the Portland Business Journal, 18 million passengers traveled through PDX in 2016. Since the facility is open 365 days a year, that works out to 49,315 people per day. Let's assume that only 10% of those people are dropped off or picked up by a friend or family member. That makes 4,932 people dropped off or picked up by someone who could be a CHL holder. Our analysis shall exclude taxi, shuttle bus, and ride share drivers since most of them are prohibited by company policy from carrying a concealed firearm. Out of the 4,932 people providing rides to or from PDX per day, about 407 of them would hold a CHL. Since not every CHL holder carries all the time, let's assume that only 10% of those 407 people are carrying their concealed

handgun while at PDX. That makes roughly 41 armed CHL holders passing through PDX property every day. If CHL holders were committing crimes with their firearms, we should see several news reports about an incident at PDX involving a CHL holder. However, my investigation revealed that the only incident involving a gun at PDX that made the news was when a felon shot himself accidentally while scuffling with police in 2019. Felons are prohibited from possessing firearms and are also ineligible for CHLs, so the person in question could not have been a CHL holder when the incident occurred. If a large test case, like PDX doesn't reveal a problem, then perhaps the problem does not exist.

Finally, SB 554 targets innocent people. As you might deduce from the exercise above, CHL holders are some of the least likely members of society to commit crimes. According to Crime Prevention Research Center data, police commit crimes involving firearms at a significantly higher rate than CHL holders. For example, CPRC data for Oregon in 2016 show that 0.0074% of CHL holders were convicted of any felony, violent or non-violent. Most of those convictions are likely unrelated to firearms. Why target people who are least likely to commit crimes and make them felons for performing an act that harms no one? Some proponents of this bill may think that our country imprisons too many people for victimless crimes. Why pass a law creating another victimless crime to lock up more people?

Perhaps some in the public fear CHL holders, but their fear is misplaced. CHL holders are your neighbors, coworkers, the coach on your daughter's soccer team. You meet CHL holders in your daily routine and don't realize it. You've probably been standing next to a CHL holder in line at the grocery store. If the supporters of this bill see SB 554 as a crime prevention measure, they are looking in the wrong place.

In summary, SB 554 runs contrary to most people's value of bodily sovereignty. It grants power to unelected officials, allowing them to criminalize behavior that harms no one. The bill is unnecessary, since proponents lack evidence that CHL holders put people at risk inside public buildings. Finally, SB 554 targets those least likely to commit crimes and threatens them with a felony conviction. I respectfully ask members of the Senate Judiciary Committee to vote against advancing SB 554.

Regards,
Earl Hixson