



Date: February 22, 2021
To: Senate Judiciary Committee, Chair Prozanski and Members
From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations
RE: *SB 554 [Gun safety in public buildings]*

It is my honor to testify in support of SB 554 on behalf of OEA's 41,000 members, which will give public officials, including educators, another tool to help keep our schools and communities safer.

We have 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 thank Sen. Ginny Burdick for championing this effort for more than two decades.

We believe that SB 554 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 grounds.*
- 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 554 tells otherwise law-abiding Oregonians that there are some places their guns should not go because the risks are too great. For this reason, we urge you to move this bill to the Senate floor with a do-pass recommendation. Thank you.

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