



Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: March 18, 2023

TO: Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Andersen and Wallan, and
Members of the House Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Ryan Hassan, MD, MPH, FAAP
Member of the Oregon Pediatric Society

SUBJECT: Support for HB 2006 & SB 527 – Raising Age for Firearm Possession & Purchase

My name is Ryan Hassan, MD, MPH, FAAP. I am a pediatrician practicing in Happy Valley and a member of the Oregon Pediatric Society and the American Academy of Pediatrics. We support HB 2006 and SB 527 to raise the minimum age to purchase or possess a firearm to age 21. If passed, this legislation will reduce the number of children injured or killed in Oregon each year.

Scope of the Problem

Though it has been highly politicized, gun violence is a public health issue. Guns are now the leading cause of fatal injury in the United States, more common than motor vehicle collisions.

In 2017 in the US, 23,854 people died by suicide with a gun; 14,542 people were intentionally killed by gun injuries; and 486 people died of unintentional gun injuries. About 10% of these deaths occur in children and adolescents. Among US adolescents 15-19 years old, gun homicides are the second leading cause of death; gun suicides are the third (1).

Oregon is no different from the rest of the country when it comes to gun violence. In 2017, 528 Oregonians died by firearms, and 83% of firearm deaths in Oregon are suicides. From 2013 – 2016 in Oregon, guns were responsible for 62% of all homicides, including 90% of all gang-related homicides, 65% of all intimate partner violence homicides, and 92% of homicide-suicides (39).

This appears to be a uniquely American problem. Forty-nine times as many young adults die by guns in the US compared to other high-income countries. In fact, for every ten children under age 15 killed by guns globally, nine live in the US (2). This is not a reflection of our rates of mental illness, as gun-interest groups claim. Other countries with similar rates of mental illness and stricter gun laws have significantly lower rates of gun deaths than the US. This year, there will be more than 35,000 people who die from gun injuries in the US, including about 3,000 children. Today, seven children will wake up ready for a normal day, and be shot and killed. Tomorrow, the same thing will happen again.

Financial Burden

Though the greatest cost of gun violence is measured in lives lost, it also poses a significant financial burden. Gun violence costs Americans more than \$730 million per year in hospital



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costs, most of which comes from Medicaid and low-income self-paying patients (6). The medical cost of treating gun injuries in children alone was over \$330 million in 2010 (1). The cost of lost productivity from gun violence is significantly higher. In 2000, the cost of lost productivity was \$16.6 billion for gun assaults and homicides, and \$16.3 billion for self-inflicted gun injuries and suicide (7).

Risks of Gun Ownership

Despite these stark statistics, many Americans believe that owning a gun makes them safer. This has been thoroughly disproven. Guns in the home in urban areas are associated with three times the risk of homicide and five times the risk of suicide (19, 20). Guns in the home are also 22 times more likely to be used in a domestic homicide, suicide, or unintentional shooting than to be used in self-defense (8). Carrying a gun during an assault increases the risk of being shot by 400% (21).

Perhaps the greatest risk of gun ownership is the risk of pediatric suicide. Multiple individual-level and ecologic studies have found that adolescents' risk for suicide increases as their access to guns does (11-16), even for adolescents without prior psychiatric diagnoses. We know that suicides in youth are often impulsive, and easy access to lethal weapons increases the risk: 90% of suicide attempts with guns result in death, compared to less than 5% of suicide attempts using less lethal means like medications or sharp objects (9, 10). Of the 107 Oregon youth who committed suicide in 2017, 47% did so by firearm, and firearms are responsible for 54% of all suicides in Oregon (38).

Effects of Legislation

Epidemiologists have studied gun legislation directly and found that it can be quite effective. Stricter gun laws are significantly associated with reduced firearm-related deaths on national and state levels (29, 30), while laws that relax gun restrictions are associated with more gun deaths (31). States with the strictest gun laws also have the lowest numbers of hospital visits for gun injuries (30). Laws that specifically reduce children's and adolescents' access to guns reduce deaths from unintentional shootings by as much as 23% and suicides by as much as 8.3% (32-34). These laws also lead families with preschool-aged children to store their guns more safely (35), and reduce the number of students who report carrying a gun in the last 30 days (37). When we regulate guns, our children are safer.

Bottom Line

When car crashes became a leading cause of death in the US, the automobile industry blamed the crashes on drivers. When we found lead in our water and our children's blood, industries that produced leaded gasoline and leaded paint attempted to squelch the data. When we learned that tobacco causes lung cancer, the tobacco industry claimed smoking was safe. In each of these cases, public health professionals and legislators found the courage to fight back against corporate profits for the sake of our children, and passed seat belt and car seat laws,



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removed lead from American products, and regulated the sale of tobacco. As a result, tens of thousands of lives have been saved. Today we have an opportunity to find that same courage, and pass legislation that will reduce the number of Oregon children dying from guns each year; because even one dead child is too many. OPS and I urge you to vote yes on HB 2006.

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