



March 21, 2023

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Andersen and Wallan, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Michael Smith. I am a resident of Multnomah County and currently serve as Chair of the Gun Owners Caucus of the Democratic Party of Oregon. I testify today on behalf of the Gun Owners Caucus to express our enthusiastic support for HB 3513.

The intent of HB 3513 is suicide prevention, and the need for suicide prevention is dire. According to the Oregon Health Authority, four out of every five firearms deaths in Oregon are suicides, and that figure stays consistent year after year. Furthermore, firearm suicide attempts, unlike most other forms of suicide attempts, are almost always fatal. Last but not least, the research shows that most mass shootings start as suicidal ideation, and then accelerate into something even worse. Because of this, we believe that suicide prevention is Oregon's most pressing gun safety issue.

In seeking solutions to the gun suicide issue, our Caucus formed a work group to review available research on the matter, and in particular to the mental health community. What the mental health community tells us is that *anyone*, regardless of their past or their station in life, can find themselves in a temporary state of mind where suicide seems like a good idea. The most important thing is to break them out of that state of mind. Time and distance between the person experiencing suicidal ideation and their firearms can be a matter, literally, of life and death.

Oregon, to our credit, has safe storage laws to encourage increasing time between a person and their firearm, and red flag laws so that a judge can decide when someone is too dangerous to be around firearms. What we lack is a means for a person who believes that they shouldn't be around firearms to *easily and voluntarily* put more time and distance between them and their firearms.

For this reason, the Caucus worked with the Black Caucus, the Rural Caucus, and myriad others to put the following on the Democratic Party of Oregon's list of legislative priorities: "Pass legislation allowing gun owners to easily transfer locked firearms to a trusted party for storage purposes only. Fund publicly available offsite storage for firearms."

HB 3513 would accomplish this legislative priority.

First, it would allow a firearm owner to enter into a voluntary hold agreement with a gun dealer or another person they trust, for safekeeping purposes only. It does so without requiring a background check, and properly so, because the mental health community tells us that we need to make it as easy as possible to enter into these agreements in good faith.

Second, it provides for offsite storage lockers, so that a firearm owner may secure their firearms outside of their home for *any* reason. While our focus has been on suicide, these kinds of agreements would also be useful in other situations, such as deployments or wildfires, or even because the grandkids are coming over.

Third, it educates the public by including prevention training in Oregon's concealed handgun license curriculum, a practice already successfully implemented in other states, including Utah.

In conclusion, this bill is a carefully thought out measure that addresses Oregon's most pressing gun safety problem in a way that follows the recommendations of the mental health experts. We know it will save lives and urge its swift passage into law.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Smith, Chair, DPO Gun Owners' Caucus