



OREGON PSYCHIATRIC
PHYSICIANS ASSOCIATION

Date: February 7 , 2024

To: Sen. Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Sen. Kim Thatcher, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Michael Zalanka, MD
Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association

RE: SB 1503 Community Safety and Firearm Suicide Prevention Task Force

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and members of the committee, my name is Dr. Michael Zalanka and I'm here to testify on behalf of the Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association. OPPA supports SB 1503, which establishes the Community Safety and Firearm Suicide Prevention Task Force. This bill would establish and fund a bipartisan task force that would examine barriers to reducing deaths from gun violence and suicide among Oregonians, including barriers facing vulnerable groups including children, adolescents, and rural Oregonians. The bill would target stigma surrounding suicide, would allow for staff support from the Oregon Health Authority, and would provide funding to ensure that the task force could achieve its mandate.

In Oregon, over half of suicide deaths are due to firearms, and our state's firearm suicide rate is 40 percent higher than the national average. In contrast to other methods of attempted suicide, which typically have a relatively low fatality rate, 85 percent of suicide attempts by firearm result in death. Even when suicide attempts by firearm do not result in death, they invariably result in severe morbidity, disability, and disfigurement.

In my role as consultation psychiatrist and Medical Director at a Portland-based Level I trauma center., I have been involved in the aftermaths of many attempted suicides by firearm and I have seen first-hand the immense pain and suffering caused by these tragic events. I have witnessed the distress of individuals in the wake of their suicide attempts, as well as the distress of family members, who often question what they could have done to prevent these tragic events. For each pa-

tient I see who has survived suicide by firearm, 8 or 9 others do not make it to the hospital. In Oregon, more than 500 families each year must mourn these losses.

I also treat victims of firearm violence, who face similar challenges and who likewise often have lost limb and independence. These patients may experience PTSD as a consequence of their experience. With some injuries, they may not be able to return to their jobs, or community roles, or their homes. Rates of firearm violence and injuries due to such violence have unfortunately increased in recent years, with immeasurable toll.

My strongly-held belief from working with these patients and their families has been that we as a community can and should be doing more to help prevent these tragedies. This bill before the legislature would help mental health providers, community stakeholders, and lawmakers better understand the factors that lead to firearm violence and suicide. SB 1503 is a needed and necessary measure that could make a measurable and meaningful difference in keeping vulnerable Oregonians safe, and in making Oregon safer for all.

I urge the committee to pass SB 1503. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter.