

SB 1503

Senate Committee members,

I am writing to you in response to SB 1503. I hope that my words of advice and professional experiences help guide this piece of legislation. We are all here at this point because we want to make a difference in the lives of Oregonians. We want everyone to be safe and we want to save lives. While I do believe SB 1503 is well-intentioned there are a few flaws. I will try to address them in a way that they can be easily understood. I want to start by saying that this comes from a place of experience as a firearms instructor, safety expert, and civil rights advocate.

The first part that I would like to address is who should be a part of this task force. There is no mention of Law Enforcement or a member from a District Attorney. I feel that this is a problem because part of the problem that we are facing at the state level is a lack of enforcement and lack of prosecution of gun crimes. I believe that strengthening current gun laws for those who are caught with illegal guns or who use a gun in the commission of violent crime should face harsher penalties or some sort of mandatory minimum. Strong laws coupled with enforcement and prosecution will act as a deterrent and there is data will support my position. There has been a big push to define "ghost guns." This is a made-up term meant to demonize a completely normal and lawful hobby of homebuilding firearms. Americans have a storied tradition of building our firearms. The real problem is illegal guns, these have the serial number removed. According to the ATF, 85% of "ghost guns" that are used in the commission of crimes have the serial numbers removed. This means that this gun is most likely stolen. There should be increased penalties for those caught with firearms that have the serial number removed. There should also be increased penalties for felons caught in possession of a firearm.

The next part I would focus on is Gun Free Zones. There was a change in our preemption laws as of last year that is detrimental to public safety. There is a very chilling stat from Dr John Lott, that 94% of mass killings happen in gun-free zones. One thing that we must look at is concealed carriers. Some studies have shown that concealed carriers are the most law-abiding citizens in our state. This will NOT lead to shootouts in the streets, this is merely a deterrent. When you have a gun-free zone, you put a target on the building where criminals, or those with mental health issues, will go to commit atrocities against the public. We should be encouraging more concealed carry in public, this is a benefit because that person has some form of training and has background checks by Law Enforcement. I know that some of these suggestions will seem foreign to some, it will be scary to others. If we truly want to fix the issues that we face, we have to try something different. We have to admit that the policies that we have in place currently, aren't working. I feel that my suggestions will work because they are based on reality and reasonable fixes to the problem our state faces.

The next component of this task force is suicide prevention. The first thing that we need to do as a state is to end the war against responsible gun owners. We are not the problem and very often we are the solution to the problems that we all face. We have to end the stigma attached to gun ownership, we are your neighbors, your coworkers, and we are your family members. Gun ownership is completely normal. When we end the stigma, we break down the walls that prevent access to care. We have a mental health crisis here in our state and an empathetic approach that normalizes access to mental health care. I work very closely with many different organizations across the country that are actively working toward the goal of preventing suicide. It is important to be able to make these important conversations easier to have with our loved ones, especially in rural areas. It is a very complex situation but, we have to start somewhere. I look forward to helping the state shape this conversation in a meaningful way that we can help save lives from day 1.

Sincerely,
Derek LeBlanc