



February 6, 2024

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

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 write today on behalf of the Gun Owners Caucus to express our support of SB 1503 and to urge its passage along with HB 4096.

One of the missions of the Caucus is to promote evidence based policies to reduce gun deaths. According to the Oregon Health Authority, three out of four Oregon gun deaths are suicides. For this reason, at our September 2023 business meeting, the Caucus adopted firearm suicide prevention as one of our top legislative priorities for the 2024 Short Session.

We believe that SB 1503, which would set up a Task Force to prevent Gun Violence and Suicide, is an important step in that direction. The need for funding for research into gun violence and suicide prevention is particularly grave. We would ask that the Task Force also include members of the shooting community, since they can provide insight that persons outside the shooting community might not have. We believe it should also include someone with experience in teaching gun safety to young people.

It's imperative, however, that we all understand that creating a task force and funding research is necessary but woefully insufficient to meet this moment. There is more work that can be done, and the Legislature has an opportunity to do that work by passing also HB 4096.

HB 4096 would clear the way for gun sellers to take temporary hold of a firearm, allowing a gun owner another easy path towards creating time and distance between themselves and a firearm. This can be done for any

change in circumstances, including a mental health crisis, but also due to military deployment, natural disaster, or any other situation that might necessitate keeping one's guns outside one's home. Unlike with a "red flag" law, these holds are *entirely voluntary* and are enacted by the *gun owner* rather than by court order.

Since the last time I testified in front of this committee, we have lost hundreds of Oregonians to suicide by firearm. Even one is too many, and we cannot let another year go by without making available this important and entirely voluntary solution. We believe that these steps, which the legislature can take *this year*, will save lives *this year*.

For this reason, we respectfully request that the legislature move to pass both SB 1503 and HB 4096.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Smith, Chair, DPO Gun Owners' Caucus