



Oregon Pediatric Society

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

DATE: February 6, 2024

TO: Senator Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Senator Kim Thatcher, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

FROM: Garret Zallen, MD, FAAP, FACS
Member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Surgical Subsection

SUBJECT: Support for SB 1503 – Keeping Kids Safer from Gun Violence

As a member of the Oregon Pediatric Society and a Pediatric Surgeon who has worked in the state of Oregon for more than 20 years, I am writing in enthusiastic support of SB 1503. Firearms are now the number-one killer of children in this country -- surpassing deaths due to motor vehicles -- and we must take strong, proactive action to put an end to this needless carnage.

To stop the rising gun mortality rate of our children, we need to understand the causes. I agree with the proposed Oregon task force and believe that it needs the representation of a pediatric medical provider who routinely talk to families and youth about gun violence prevention and gun safety in the home. The task force representation of mental health providers is essential to helping individuals who are taking their own lives due to mental health issues, but there is a growing cohort of evidence that many teenage and young adult suicides are not due to chronic or identifiable mental health issues. There are multiple examples of teenagers who have used a gun in suicide and have no identifiable issues on their routine suicide prevention screening by their child health providers or red flags to their parents. Many of these acts are spurred on by social media or peer related issues that are also unique to this age group. Since guns are by far the most lethal form of dying by suicide, we can prevent many tragic deaths of youth by preventing access to firearms. Suicide can be an impulsive act—especially in males—that was planned only minutes before the trigger was pulled.

Gun violence is a problem that adults have created for children through the tremendous number of and easy access to guns. Children in the US are dying at a rate that no other country has and we should not tolerate, and these numbers sadly continue to increase. We need to stop this tragedy now. Please vote yes on SB 1503, but also include crucial health advocates for children and families -- put a pediatric medical provider on the Community Safety and Firearm Suicide Prevention Task Force.