



February 6, 2024

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

Re: Senate Bill 1503 – Firearm Suicide Prevention Task Force, Support

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is William Miller (Blackfeet/ Cherokee), and I serve as the Executive Director of the NAYA Action Fund. The NAYA Action Fund provides tools to shape public policy, cultivate leadership, and elect's champions for issues impacting Native people. Our vision of systemic change is youth-centered, family-driven, and elder guided. I write today advocating for the passage of SB 1503, the Community Safety and Firearm Suicide Prevention Task Force.

Gun violence is not just a statistic; it's a devastating reality that affects all communities across Oregon. While the impacts of gun violence and firearm suicide impact all Oregonians, Indigenous communities face particularly devastating consequences. From 2000 to 2020, firearm deaths among American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities doubled, with a nearly 40% increase in the rate of gun deaths from 2019 to 2020 alone. In Oregon, 80% of firearm deaths are suicides, and firearm suicide rates for AI/AN individuals are 1.4 times higher than for non-AI/AN individuals. Alarmingly, over the past five years, more AI/AN individuals under 35 have died by firearm suicide than any other cause.

The impact of firearm suicide on youth is especially concerning. Nationally, guns are the most common cause of death for children and teens, with half of the 95 children and teens who died by suicide in Oregon in 2021 using firearms. While Oregon has made progress in reducing youth suicides overall, rates for AI/AN youth have increased by 63% over the past 20 years, with AI/AN youth having the highest firearm suicide rate among all ethnic/racial groups.

It's paramount to recognize that firearms offer no second chances in suicide attempts. While attempts may occur at similar rates in homes with and without firearms, rates are four times higher in houses with firearms due to their lethality. Additionally, AI/AN women face some of the highest rates of intimate partner violence, with a partner's access to firearms increasing the likelihood of lethal outcomes by five times. This bill will bring together those most impacted by firearm suicides, along with researchers, and healthcare professionals, to study the issue and make recommendations for reducing firearm injuries and deaths.

On behalf of the NAYA Action Fund, we urge you to support SB 1503.

Wado (thank you),

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Wado", is written over a white background.

William Miller
Executive Director