

Testimony in support of SB1503
Create a State Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Firearm Suicide Prevention

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

I am writing today in support of SB 1503, the Task Force bill on gun violence prevention and firearm suicide prevention.

Just over 10 years ago we had a family member shot and killed at a large shopping mall here in SE Portland. The shooter killed another innocent person that afternoon, plus his final act was to take his own life with a firearm shortly afterwards. The impact of this gun violence act on my family compelled me to advocate for gun violence prevention bills and gun safety bills. I am also the father of a 4th Grade teacher here in the Portland area. Every teacher and student in the country has to practice active shooter and lock down drills. Lastly, I have been a gun owner most of my life and still am.

I spent 4 years as Trauma Intervention Program (TIP) volunteer here in the Portland area. TIP volunteers are called out by Police and Fire to provide emotional first aid and immediate assistance for those who have just been through a traumatic event. These traumatic events could be a house fire, traffic accident, death of a family member, death of a friend, shooting and suicides. In my 4 years as a TIP volunteer I responded to 7 suicides, 5 of those suicides were completed with a firearm. While all of the suicides are traumatic and tragic, I saw the most traumatized family\friends at the firearm suicide scenes. These firearm suicide scenes are by far the most graphic and unforgettable for everyone. These firearm suicides occurred when the victim was alone at home for short time span. In some cases, the family members didn't even where or how the victim obtained the firearm they used to end their life.

We know from research studies on firearm suicide prevention, there are proven tools and programs that can reduce the rates of firearm suicide. We also know from studies on gun violence prevention there are gun violence interruption programs if funded that can reduce gun violence in our communities.

Every year, we lose close to 600 Oregonians to preventable firearm deaths. Black Oregonians are roughly 10 times more likely than white people to die by firearm homicide. And the firearm suicide rate in rural Oregon is 2.5 times higher than in urban areas and the state's veteran suicide rate is 37% higher than the national average.

I strongly support the SB1503, Task Force bill, and urge the Task Force to prioritize prevention efforts that are centered around those most impacted by gun deaths and shootings, as well as firearm suicides. I urge the Task Force to analyze and prioritize ongoing, sustainable funding for efforts for prevention work that is making the most meaningful, equitable impact, both for homicide and suicide prevention.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony on this issue.

Sincerely,
Paul Kemp
Happy Valley, Oregon