

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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Testimony on SB 347 and SB 700
Senate Committee on Judiciary

My name is David Leslie, and I am the Executive Director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is an association of Christian denominations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners from all regions and communities throughout the state.

On the day after the 45th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I am here to testify in support of SB 347 and SB 700. Although our members have diverse beliefs, there is strong interreligious consensus that it is time to support measures that promote responsible gun ownership in our society. This commitment grows out of witnessing an increase of death and injury caused by guns in our neighborhoods, places of worship, shopping malls and schools. In the midst of the seemingly unending call for more weapons in more places and at all times of the day and night, we say it is time for sensible action that improves the health and wellness of all in society. As Dr. King said in a sermon just four days before his death, "Nothing will be done until people of goodwill put their bodies and their souls in motion."

Towards these ends, EMO supports common sense measures that will pass the constitutional test of responsible gun ownership, while minimizing irresponsible access, display and utilization of weapons. As such, we add our support to SB 347 because this law will give school districts control over who is allowed to bring firearms onto school premises. Currently, 169,000 Oregonians have concealed handgun licenses. Under current law, any of these licensed gun owners are allowed to bring a firearm, including an assault weapon, into a public school without the school's knowledge. We give our school officials the great responsibility to keep our children safe while in school. This bill gives them more control over who should be allowed to carry a gun on public school property, thereby reducing the potential for accidental or intentional firearm injuries.

I am also here to support SB 700. We believe that expanding background checks to most gun sales, including sales between private parties, will improve safety and reduce the risk of gun-related violence. A January 2013 pollⁱ found that 81 percent of Oregonians support universal background checks on all gun sales. Background checks work. From 1994 through 2008, according to research from the Bureau of Justice, background checks prevented 1.8 million people who are prohibited from buying guns in the United States from doing so.ⁱⁱ We acknowledge that gun ownership is a right that entails major responsibilities, which we believe includes background checks before purchase to ensure that guns are sold only to those who are legally and mentally in a position to own firearms.

We firmly believe that SB 347 and SB 700 will enhance the common good, make our communities safer, and strengthen responsible gun ownership. While the decisions related to gun ownership are not easy, you must act. It is clear that we are on a trajectory of growing violence in which guns of increasing killing power are used more and more often to inflict maximum havoc and injury by those who have no business having access to these weapons. We must turn this tide, and as Dr. King said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Gun violence is a matter of great importance. We must not remain silent. I urge you to support SB 347 and SB 700.

Respectfully,
David Leslie

ⁱJeff Mapes, "Oregonians skeptical of gun control in general, but support some new firearm restrictions," *The Oregonian*, Feb. 2, 2013, at http://oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2013/02/oregonians_skeptical_of_gun_co.html.

ⁱⁱBureau of Justice Statistics, *Background Checks for Firearm Transfers, 2009 - Statistical Tables* <http://www.bradycampaign.org/studies/view/217/>