

March 31, 2015

Dear Chair Prozanski, and Members of the Committee-

My name is Jessica Quarles. I live in South East Portland. I am a nurse, a public health professional, a mother and a constituent. I am submitting written testimony in support of Senate Bill 941.

It is time for Oregon to close the background check loophole. As I testified last year, gun violence is a public health issue, and a rational public health approach can reduce gun-related injuries and deaths. In the same way that coordinated efforts between law enforcement, legislators, policy makers and citizens have reduced traffic fatalities, we can and must implement policies such as SB 941 to reduce the likelihood that firearms will be sold to prohibited persons.

There is much work to be done in Oregon. Since 2009, firearm fatalities in Oregon have exceeded traffic fatalities. Each year, the vast majority of these firearm deaths were suicide. We can and must do more to reduce these fatalities. A critical step in preventing gun fatalities and injuries is closing the loophole that allows those who are a potential danger to themselves and other access to firearms without a background check. Currently both Washington State and California have closed the background check loophole. We must close the loophole that allows firearms to be sold in Oregon without a background check. Guns are not an export we want Oregon to be known for.

The personal and emotional toll of gun violence is tremendous, and so unfortunately is the financial cost. Gun violence costs an average of \$645 per gun in America. The APHA reports that cost per firearm injury is \$433,000 for each hospital admission, and each fatality results in over \$5 million in lost wages, medical and mental health care, emergency transportation, law enforcement/criminal justice activities, insurance claims processing and decreased quality of life – for each fatality. This resulted in an estimated cost of \$174 billion in the US in 2010.<sup>1</sup> While lives lost are never ever about dollars and cents, it is important to know we could have spent this money educating our children, building our communities and preventing gun violence, instead of mourning the daily loss of our fellow Americans.

The Oregon Public Health Association (OPHA), of which I am a member, supports Oregon Senate Bill 941, which closes the background check loophole. There is more that needs to be done, but this is a critical first step to reducing injury and stemming the tide of gun fatalities and injuries. While efforts like background checks are often rightly framed as ‘common sense,’ I believe these actions are simply good policy.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue and your service to Oregon.

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Oregon Public Health Association Member

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Safety Network Economics and Data Analysis Resource Center at Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. (2012). Miller TR, data analyst. *The Cost of Firearm Violence*. Calverton, MD: <http://www.childrensafetynetwork.org/publications/cost-firearm-violence>. Accessed 4 February 2013.- Cited in APHA’s Gun Violence Prevention Issue Brief. Access here: <http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/214B37EC-B3A7-4A2B-A501-AEE178AD533E/0/APHAGunViolenceFactSheet3182.pdf> Accessed December 9, 2013