

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Interchurch Center, Suite B ■ 0245 SW Bancroft Street ■ Portland, Oregon 97239
phone (503) 221-1054 ■ fax (503) 223-7007 ■ Web site www.emoregon.org

April 22, 2015

Chair Val Hoyle
Vice-Chair Barbara Smith Warner
Vice-Chair Vic Gilliam
Members of the House Committee on Rules

Re: SB 941

Chair Hoyle, Vice-Chairs Smith Warner and Gilliam and Members of the House Committee on Rules:

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is an association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners from all regions and communities throughout the state. 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 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther 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. We support SB 941 because it closes a loophole that currently allows the private sale of guns between two parties without a background check. These sales have moved to the internet and other unregulated arenas, where sellers often advertise no-background-check gun sales. In states that require comprehensive background checks for the sale of guns, 46 percent fewer women are shot to death by an intimate partner.¹

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 2015 poll found that 87 percent of Oregonians support universal background checks, including 83 percent of gun owners.² Background checks work. Federal background checks have stopped more than 2.1 million prohibited purchasers, including felons, domestic abusers and the dangerously mentally ill, from buying guns. 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.

SB 941 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 941.

Respectfully,
David Leslie
Executive Director, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

¹ Everytown for Gun Safety, www.everytown.org/issue/background-checks/

² Oregon poll conducted by Benenson Strategy Group for Americans for Responsible Solutions, Jan. 12-15, 2015.