

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF MIKE REESE, FORMER PORTLAND POLICE CHIEF

The Need for Background Checks: Keeping Guns Out of the Hands of Criminals

April 22, 2015

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the proposed legislation to expand criminal background checks to all gun sales in Oregon. I recently retired as Chief of the Portland Police Bureau after 25 years in law enforcement.

As the Chief I was responsible for the safety of people in the City of Portland, and for the safety of the police officers protecting our community. One of the threats I worried about most was gun violence. And keeping people safe from gun violence was one of our top priorities.

I believe one of the best ways to make sure that a person buying a gun, has a legal right to own a gun, is with a simple, straightforward background check. Current law rightfully prohibits certain dangerous people from having guns, such as felons, domestic abusers, and people with severe mental illness.

Background checks, combined with rigorous enforcement, are the surest way to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. But right now it is far too easy in Oregon for a prohibited person to avoid a background check by simply buying a gun from an unlicensed seller.

Websites such as armslist.com make it easy for criminals to connect with unlicensed sellers. For criminals our current system is ideal. No background check, no verification, and no documentation.

I own firearms. And if I were to sell one of my guns, as a responsible owner I would want to know that the buyer wasn't a criminal. SB 941 creates an easy way for responsible gun owners to make sure their firearm doesn't end up in the hands of a criminal, used to commit a violent crime.

Expanding and strengthening the background check system is a proven way to prevent gun violence. Data shows that in states that require a background check for all handgun sales, there are significant decreases in violent activities, including 46% fewer women shot to death by intimate partners and 48% fewer law enforcement officers shot to death with handguns.

Opponents to this type of legislation say criminals don't complete background checks, the law will be difficult to enforce, and or we're just penalizing legal gun owners.

First, as we know from Oregon State Police data, criminals do attempt to buy guns from licensed dealers by filling out a background check form. In fact, these background checks prevented nearly 4,000 prohibited people from buying a gun in 2013 from a licensed dealer. The system is working to stop these sales and will work to shut off the supply of guns to criminals through private sales. Second, the laws prohibiting certain people from possessing firearms are clear, and we need rigorous enforcement to hold criminals accountable when they attempt to acquire a firearm. As a community we should prioritize the necessary police resources to conduct investigations into violations of these laws.

Lastly, I am a strong supporter of the Second Amendment and the rights enshrined in our Constitution. But, with those rights come responsibilities. We are all responsible for public

safety, and we should do everything we can as a community to keep guns away from criminals and other dangerous people.

That means closing the loophole easily exploited by criminals to purchase guns from unlicensed sellers with no background check, and no questions asked.

I ask for your support of this important legislation.