

Ted Alcorn, Research Director, Everytown for Gun Safety.

Testimony on SB 941 – requiring background checks on all gun sales

Thank you Mister Chairman. My name is Ted Alcorn, and I am the Research Director for Everytown for Gun Safety.

Like everyone in this room, I share an interest in evidence-based policy. To give proper consideration to the legislation before you, I believe it is important to have the best available information about the market for guns in Oregon, the population currently accessing firearms in unlicensed sales, and how the gun background check system impacts public safety. For over a year, Everytown has undertaken research on the online market for guns in Oregon, and I have come here today prepared to share our latest research with you. It provides vivid evidence that loopholes in current law are allowing dangerous people to arm themselves online with no background checks, no questions asked.

In accordance with federal law, licensed gun dealers in Oregon already conduct background checks for all gun sales, and it is clear that this commonsense safety measure keeps guns out of dangerous hands. Everytown obtained and analyzed data from the FBI, which shows that since 2007, background checks in Oregon have blocked more than 31,000 gun sales to prohibited people.

But there is a fatal exception to this system: under federal law, guns offered in unlicensed “private” sales are exempt from this check. These sales leave no paper trail so we can only estimate the actual total, but we know from national surveys and the experience of other states that tens of thousands of these sales take place in Oregon each year.

In the year 2000, Oregon’s citizens recognized the threat posed by unlicensed gun sales and an overwhelming majority of them voted to require background checks at gun shows, where unlicensed sales were most apparent at the time. But 15 years later, the explosive growth of the internet has effectively erased those gains in public safety. Today, numerous websites function like Craigslist, connecting anonymous unlicensed sellers who want to meet offline to buy guns, and this virtual market now dwarfs sales at gun shows: Everytown’s research shows that **unlicensed sellers in Oregon post more gun ads online each week than they sell at the state’s gun shows in a full year.**

Make no mistake: when dangerous people are allowed to evade the background check system and purchase guns, they threaten the very foundations of public safety. Everytown analyzed all gun murders of law enforcement officers in Oregon over the last twenty-five years, and found that **more than half** were killed by individuals who were prohibited from possessing firearms at the time of the incident.

If you are skeptical that criminals are seeking guns in unlicensed online sales, our research leaves little room for doubt. Over a seven-month period Everytown conducted

an investigation of Oregon's online gun market, the first of its kind, and watched in real-time as criminals and domestic abusers sought guns in unlicensed online sales.

This included a 25-year-old man in Gresham who texted investigators in search of a cheap Hi-Point handgun; several years earlier he had been convicted of domestic abuse and felony burglary, which barred him from owning guns. A 29-year-old man in Portland responded to an ad for a similar handgun with an offer of \$100, even though his numerous felony convictions and habitual meth use barred him from possessing guns. And a 48-year-old man in Newberg, who was under an active domestic restraining order for threatening to kill the mother of his child, nevertheless responded to several gun ads placed by our investigators, stating (and I quote) "if you have this weapon I will buy it from you Saturday."

Of the full sample of would-be gun buyers, **1 in 18** was prohibited by state or federal law from possessing firearms. What's more, that number is **nearly 4 times higher** than the share of prohibited people seeking guns at licensed dealers, suggesting that criminals are aware of this loophole in the background check system and are flocking to it. At this rate, just four websites in Oregon could transfer over 1,300 guns to criminals each year.

SB-941 would close this loophole by requiring background checks on all gun sales in the state, with reasonable exceptions for family transfers, hunting, and self-defense. Seventeen states have passed legislation requiring background checks for all handgun sales, including Washington State, and the data suggests that this measure saves lives. An Everytown analysis of CDC and FBI data found that in states that have adopted these requirements, there are 46% fewer women shot to death by intimate partners, 48% fewer law enforcement shot to death with handguns, and 48% fewer firearm suicides.

In conclusion, the data demonstrate that Oregon's background check system has blocked thousands of gun sales to criminals, but until loopholes are closed, they will continue to arm themselves in the ready online market. Requiring background checks on all gun sales will eliminate this loophole and will save lives.

I am happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.