

Chairman Prozanski and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee;

Please accept this testimony in support of SB 868, Extreme Risk Protection Orders. It comes from the heart as I lost a dear nephew to suicide five years ago.

The brutal fact is that the largest category of gun deaths in the United States is gun-related suicides. Roughly two-thirds of all gun deaths in this country are suicides; sadly Oregon's rate surpasses the national average. Access to firearms significantly increases the risk that a suicide attempt will be fatal. While suicide attempts involving methods other than guns have a 5 percent fatality rate, 85 percent of suicide attempts with a firearm are fatal.

According to the Oregon Public Health Division, over half of all suicides (56%) from 2010 to 2014 were completed using firearms. Previous mental health diagnoses (45% had a depressed mood; 34% had been diagnosed with mental health problems; 26% were receiving treatment for a mental health problem) and suicide threats (34%) or attempts (12%) could all be potential indicators. White males in Oregon have the highest rate of suicide by firearm in Oregon.

The rates of suicide by firearm are much higher in rural Oregon counties than in urban areas. Small counties - Curry, Gilliam, Harney, Lake, Wheeler - have rates that are 4 times higher than Portland.

Clearly SB 868 could help reduce the number of suicides for those with mental health problems, suicidal thoughts, or past suicide attempts. SB 868 allows family members concerned about a loved ones' depression, anxiety or other disorder to ask the court to find that person in imminent risk of suicide. Although this law is unlikely to prevent all suicides, it will provide families an opportunity to reduce the risk of suicide and provide safer circumstances in which to seek treatment for their loved ones. Given the horrible rates of suicide in Oregon, it seems reasonable to empower families to act to save those they love.

Thank you.

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