

Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence
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Testimony of Adelyn Allchin, Public Health Analyst, Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence
IN SUPPORT OF SB 868, creates process for obtaining an Extreme Risk Protection Order
Before the Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee
April 17, 2017 at 8:00am

Honorable Chairperson and Committee members,

As the Public Health Analyst for the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, I am writing today in support of Senate Bill 868, which creates a process for obtaining an Extreme Risk Protection Order that prohibits a person from possessing firearms when the court finds that person presents imminent risk, or risk in the foreseeable future, of suicide or causing injury to other persons. This bill would give the court the ability to order a respondent to temporarily surrender firearms, ammunition, and concealed handgun license for the duration of the order.

Currently, gaps in Oregon law make it difficult for law enforcement and family members to temporarily remove firearms from individuals at risk of harming themselves or others. Background checks ensure that individuals with qualifying firearms purchase and possession prohibitions cannot obtain new firearms, but there are few mechanisms to remove firearms already possessed. Additionally, there are times when an individual is dangerous to him/herself or others, yet is not subject to a qualifying firearm prohibition. An Extreme Risk Protection Order fills this gap.

The components of this bill are something I consider frequently. Every day I synthesize research evidence surrounding the issue of risk of violence towards self or others, access to guns, and gun deaths. Using the best available research, we identify persons who are at highest risk of committing violent acts and craft policies to ensure that those highest at risk are prohibited from purchasing and possessing firearms. From this research, we have learned that law enforcement and families are desperate for tools to intervene before violence occurs, and that policies similar to the proposed Extreme Risk Protection Order can save lives.

Research shows that easy access to firearms increases the risk of suicide.¹ Eighty-five percent of suicide attempts with firearms are lethal, whereas by comparison, more common suicide attempt methods such as poisoning/overdose are lethal only 2% of the time.² As such, reducing access to firearms increases the probability that an individual in crisis will survive a suicide attempt.

¹ Miller, M., Barber, C., White, R. A., & Azrael, D. (2013). Firearms and suicide in the United States: Is risk independent of underlying suicidal behavior?. *American journal of epidemiology*, 178(6), 946-955.

² Miller, M., Azrael, D., & Barber, C. (2012). Suicide mortality in the United States: the importance of attending to method in understanding population-level disparities in the burden of suicide. *Annual review of public health*, 33, 393-408.

Research also shows that temporarily restricting access to firearms to individuals at a high risk of dangerous behavior is an effective policy. Notably, an evaluation of Connecticut's risk-warrant law, a law that is similar to the proposed legislation, showed that for every 10 to 20 risk-warrants issued, one life is saved. Moreover, nearly one-third of risk-warrant subjects received treatment in the public behavioral health system in the year following the issuance of a risk-warrant.³ This means that temporary risk-based firearms removal policies can not only save lives, but can also serve as a catalyst for individuals to receive desperately needed mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Based on this research, a report from the Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy – a group of the nation's leading researchers, practitioners, and advocates in gun violence prevention and public health – recommends that individuals at a high risk of violence to self or others not only be temporarily prohibited from purchasing and possessing firearms, but that they also temporarily relinquish firearms they possess for the duration of the order.⁴ And we agree wholeheartedly with this recommendation. The evidence is clear: access to guns while an individual is in crisis can create a deadly situation.

The proposed bill requires that firearms be temporarily removed for the duration of an Extreme Risk Protection Order to address this risky period where individuals are at a high risk of harming themselves or others. As the risk of violence diminishes and the order expires, the respondent may get their firearms back.

The cost of doing nothing is too great to bear. Over the last decade (2006-2015), more than half of all suicide deaths in Oregon were by firearm,⁵ and firearm suicide is the leading cause of violent death in the state.⁶ Nearly every day for the last 10 years, an Oregonian has died by firearm suicide.⁷

Fortunately, Senate Bill 868 has the opportunity to reduce the burden of firearm suicide in Oregon, as well as prevent firearm homicides. With this new legislation, Oregon would fill a gap in their laws and provide law enforcement and families with the tools they need to save lives.

The evidence is clear: temporarily removing firearms from those at a high risk of committing violence will save lives. Oregon has the opportunity to promote evidence-based laws, and I urge

³ Swanson, JW, Norko, M, Lin, HJ, Alanis-Hirsch, K, Frisman, L, Baranoski, M, Easter, M, Gilbert, A, Swartz, M, & Bonnie, RJ. Implementation and Effectiveness of Connecticut's Risk-Based Gun Removal Law: Does it Prevent Suicides? (August 24, 2016). Law and Contemporary Problems, Forthcoming. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2828847>

⁴ Guns, Public Health, and Mental Illness: An Evidence-Based Approach to State Policy. <http://efsgv.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Final-State-Report.pdf>

⁵ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2015, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED). Retrieved April 14, 2017, from http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html

⁶ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. Leading Causes of Death Reports, 1999-2015, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED). Retrieved April 14, 2017, from <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html>

⁷ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2015, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED). Retrieved April 14, 2017, from http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html

you to support Senate Bill 868, which creates a process for obtaining an Extreme Risk Protection Order.

Sincerely,

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Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence