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March 26, 2019

To: Senate Education Committee  
Senator Rob Wagner, Chair

Re: **SB 801** – Relating to firearm safety instruction at public schools – **Oppose**

The League of Women Voters strongly supports strategies that effectively reduce the number of gun deaths and injuries among school-age children. According to a 2017 *Pediatrics* report, firearm-related deaths are the third leading cause of death overall among U.S. children aged 1 to 17 years and the second leading cause of injury-related death. SB 801 seeks to reduce gun deaths in children by providing a thirty-minute firearm safety class to first graders in all public schools in Oregon. We are pleased to see that an opt-out provision is included, that the class does not take time away from other subject areas, and that instructors would not use real firearms or live ammunition. However, we question whether SB 801 would achieve its intended goal for the following reasons:

First, we believe it is important to base educational mandates on provable strategies. A 2018 Rutgers School of Nursing [study](#) points out that children who participate in gun safety programs do not retain the skills they learn and most will still approach a firearm in an unsupervised setting. A small child's natural curiosity appears to hold far more sway than an annual thirty-minute class.

Secondly, it is our view that the onus should be on adult gunowners to store weapons responsibly and keep firearms away from children. When two million children live in homes with guns that are improperly stored, loaded, and unlocked, it is no wonder that gun deaths and injuries in children have become a public health epidemic. It doesn't have to be this way. If we can successfully place strict safety rules on a long list of consumer products, we can certainly insist on higher safety standards for firearms, using existing technology.

Lastly, we urge you as elected officials to acknowledge the urgency of this public health emergency and to work cooperatively with the public health community to pass laws that are most likely to have an impact. We applaud the educational campaigns that currently exist to remind parents and caregivers that guns in the home represent a real danger to children. These include the ASK Campaign, a collaboration between the Brady Campaign and the American Pediatric Society, that encourages parents to ask whether guns are present where their children play, and the Be Smart Campaign, program of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense, that provides five simple steps to help prevent shootings by children.

The League strongly supports evidence-based solutions, holding adults accountable for the health of our children, and the wise use of education dollars. We urge a no vote on SB 801. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views.

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