

FROM THE DESK OF  
TRACY BRYCE FARMER LCSW PC

To: Honorable Chair Jennifer Williamson and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary  
From: Tracy Bryce Farmer, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, CADC  
Date: April 1, 2019  
RE: HB 2505 Relating to firearm safety requirements; declaring an emergency.

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My name is Tracy Bryce Farmer. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor in the state of Oregon. I am currently in private practice after many years working with at-risk and homeless youth as well individual adults and families at Providence Portland Hospital. I am in favor of HB 2505 as I have direct professional experience with the state of emergency that unsecured firearms present to our state.

**In 1993, a landmark study revealed that having a gun in the home was more dangerous than not having one.** The NRA reacted to this conclusive study by promoting the idea that gun research meant people would lose their guns. In 1996, Congress passed the Dickey amendment which virtually ended all gun research by cutting off funding. In 2015 Jay Dickey said he regretted his role in pushing through this legislation. Despite this 23 year limitation on research regarding the public health epidemic of gun violence, the evidence about the risk that unsecured firearms present for suicidal and homicidal people, as well as children, is in<sup>1</sup>.

**I work every day with people who experience suicidal ideation, people who regularly think about killing themselves.** For professionals in the mental health field, this is not an uncommon symptom to encounter. I have been trained in the most effective methods for ascertaining if someone is ready to act on those suicidal urges, which includes asking a person directly how they plan to kill themselves. We do our best to uncover all the methods possible for ending their lives and follow up with plans to contain those methods. If a person imagines cutting themselves, we try to collaborate with them to contain the sharps. We support them to get a lockbox at the store, put all their knives and razors in the box, and give the key and box to someone else to hold. If a person thinks about killing themselves through overdose, we collaborate on disposing of their medication stockpile, getting someone else to dispense their medications, and putting them in a lockbox, maybe on a high shelf in their home. People who are so alone they have no support for containing these risky means ask, “Why will it help if I have my pills on a high shelf? I know they’re there and I can get them.” But the fact is, it does help. Any time or effort we can put between a person’s urge to end their pain through violent means and acting it out, is time they have to think. If they have to drag a chair out, find the key, and get the box down from the shelf, that is time they have to consider the impact of their actions. It gives them a feeling of being held, being contained, and has kept many people from acting destructively. Less commonly, I have worked with people who experience homicidal ideation, they think regularly about killing someone else. Unfortunately, both suicidal and homicidal ideation are frequently accompanied by high risk substance abuse. Alcohol and drug use increases the urgent need to contain risk by securing means. Unfortunately, it is well known that Oregon ranks among the very highest in the nation for our prevalence of substance use as well as mental health disorders<sup>2</sup>.

**Because guns are “uniquely lethal,”<sup>3</sup>** when a person tells me they have an unsecured firearm, the safety planning ratchets up. I will do all in my power to find another person in their life

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who will help them contain those dangerous means. The client gets the message loud and clear: Their unsecured firearms present an unacceptable danger to themselves and others. Health and safety is first and foremost and none of their other concerns can even be discussed until that threat is contained. For most people in this condition, they have never been cared for with this kind of urgency. They are surprised to discover that I will do whatever I can in my role as their mental health provider to secure the firearm because of the danger it presents when they are in a highly depressive, anxious or dysregulated state. They are encouraged to think of at least one person in their life who might help them contain that danger. The act of reaching out to someone else and asking them to secure a gun is a powerful message to the psyche of the suffering person. If the client already has a gun safe or other way to secure the firearm, the act of planning step by step how to re-secure the gun also sends a powerful message. It is an act of stabilization and civilization. It lets the agonized person reclaim their concern for themselves and others. Without being disrespectful to their right to own a gun or use it appropriately, it acknowledges the inherent power of firearms. It confirms their dignity as someone who wants to safeguard human life.

**Heartbreakingly, people appear more willing to consider gun safety measures like safe storage when they have already lost someone they love to suicide<sup>4</sup>.** Those of us who work with people who are in mental and emotional distress every day can easily imagine the catastrophic destruction that follows suicide or homicide. People who experience trauma through the loss of a friend or family member to suicide experience depression and anxiety; they are 65% more likely to try to kill themselves at some point in their life<sup>5</sup>. The impact of this trauma is acted out inter-generationally, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren struggle following the completed suicide of one family member. When I work with people who are suffering in this way, I do everything I can to help them contain the methods to hurt themselves or others. Unsecured guns present the most dangerous means to act on hopeless feelings. What a boon it would be for the state of Oregon if desperate people got the message loud and clear: Your feelings matter to us. We will do whatever we can to prevent you from acting on your impulses. We will help make you safe by preventing easy access to a decision that will destroy multiple lives for generations. We will help you live for another day when hope may be possible.

Bibliography:

1. [The Risk of Unsecured Guns in Oregon](#)
2. [Oregon Behavioral Health Barometer SAMHSA](#)
3. [Giffords Law Center Fact Sheets](#)
4. [People Exposed to Suicide More Open to Safe Storage](#)
5. [Committing Suicide Increases Risk for Family & Friends](#)