

### In Support of HB 2510 Secure Gun Storage

There are multiple situations in which a Secure Gun Storage law could save lives and prevent injuries and, of secondary importance, save millions of dollars in our state. Research data has shown that secure gun storage can reduce the risk of murder, successful suicide, gun theft, partner abuse and other crimes committed by stolen guns, as examples.

I would like to address, however, one particular aspect of secure gun storage, that is protecting our children. Here in Oregon, we decided some 30 years ago that an adult driving a motor vehicle should be responsible to protect any child passenger by using some form of restraint and that it is a primary offense to drive a car when a child is not protected. Yet that same adult can leave a loaded gun in a car with children, or a loaded gun in a bedside table or on a gun on a closet shelf with ammunition nearby. There is currently no legal deterrent unless an injury or death result and a legal case is pursued. An adult that has left a gun unsecured has made not just a personal choice but a choice about public health that directly endangers others and particularly children.

The threat is very real and intensifying. Consider that over 90 percent of all the firearm deaths among children and adolescents that occur in all industrialized nations occur in this country. This trend is worsening rapidly: deadly unintentional shootings by children increased 43 percent in March and April 2020 compared to average gun deaths during the same two months over the last three years. There were at least 324 unintentional shootings by children in the US in 2020, resulting in 127 deaths and 211 injuries. At least 4 of these shootings were in Oregon. There have been at least 39 unintentional shootings by children in 2021, resulting in 14 deaths and 27 injuries.

Here are myths about children and guns that make it clear how important it should be to secure all guns:

Some parents believe that hiding their guns will prevent children from accessing them. However, 75% of children who live in homes with guns know where they are stored.

Many parents think their children are not capable of firing a gun. However, children as young as 3 years old may be strong enough to pull the trigger of a handgun.

Parents believe their children know the difference between real guns and toy guns, but in 16% of unintentional firearm deaths among children younger than 13 years of age, the gun was mistaken for a toy.

Parents often believe their child would not touch a gun because "he knows better." However, studies have found that most children will handle a gun if they find one, even if they have been taught not to.

Some parents consider non-powder guns, like BB, pellet, and paintball guns, to be toys. These guns, which can fire at the speed of traditional guns, lead to nearly 22,000 injuries each year, especially eye injuries.

HB2510 will address a critical public health issue. For the same reasons that it is expected in this state that an adult should buckle a child into a car seat, they should be held accountable for securing any gun in a child's environment. To do less is to abandon our children to a very real threat of injury or death..