

Testimony in Support of HB 2510
House Committee on Health Care
Date: 3/7/2021

Dear Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Hayden and Salinas, and members of the committee,

My name is Greg Blaschke, and I am a pediatrician at Doernbecher Children's Hospital. As a retired US Navy Captain, I have seen too many effects of unsafe storage of firearms. I have known those who served in Afghanistan who have taken their own lives. I have 3 cousins who used firearms to end their own lives. I have cared for people who have suffered from gunshot wounds via gang and other violence – some of them children— at several points during my career. I have cared for siblings of children who unintentionally shot themselves or others. I write to you in strong support of HB 2510. Young children are curious by nature; pre-teens and teens have serious anxiety, depression made worse by the pandemic. We need to put safety steps in the way of impulsive events that lead to suicide.

Approximately 40% of U.S. households with children also have firearms. One in five U.S. households with children contains an unsecured, loaded gun, providing easy access and increasing the risk of youth suicide, unintentional shootings and gun violence.¹ In gun owning households, 36% of children under age 10 reported that they had handled the firearms, many without their parents' knowledge.²

In 2018 alone, 40 Oregon children and adolescents died by firearm: 28 suicides, 8 homicides, two accidental deaths and two undetermined manners of death.^{3,4} Suicide is the leading cause of death among Oregonians 10 to 24 years old, with guns being the most common mechanism.^{5,6} In fact, Oregon has the fastest-growing rate of pediatric suicide by firearm in the country.^{7,8}

While data from 2019 suggests a modest decrease in teen suicide, Oregon's teen firearm suicide rate over the last 20 years remains almost 60% higher than the national average. Approximately 90% of suicide attempts using a firearm result in death, compared with fewer than 5% of attempts with other means. Suicidal thoughts are incredibly impulsive. Over 50% of survivors of a suicide attempt report less than 10 minutes between their first thought, and their act. If a child or teen cannot get to a firearm, they are much less likely to die.

To address this crisis, many organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend the enactment of safe storage laws, such as HB 2510.^{9,10,11} Numerous studies indicate that these laws increase safe storage practices and decrease both pediatric suicide rates and accidental firearm deaths.^{12,13,14,15,16} Currently, 29 states and the District of Columbia have child access prevention (CAP) laws in place.¹⁷ Oregon, however, does not have any statutes governing firearm storage.^{18,19} Safe storage of household guns, meaning the simple act of preventing unintentional access by keeping them in a locked gun vault or safe, decreases the risk of self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens — up to 85 percent depending on the type of storage practice.

Simply put, safe gun storage laws are effective in preventing both unintentional injuries and suicide. They save kids lives.

I urge you to vote yes on HB 2510. Thank you for your consideration. I am willing to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

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- ³ Oregon Health Authority. (2018). *Firearm Safety*. Retrieved from <https://www.oregon.gov>
- ⁴ Oregon Health Authority. (2019). Injury deaths and rates, by manner, sex and age. Retrieved from https://visual-data.dhsoha.state.or.us/t/OHA/views/Oregondeathsfromexternalinjuries/DemogDash?:showAppBanner=false&:display_count=n&:showVizHome=n&:origin=viz_share_link&:isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&:embed=y
- ⁵ Oregon Health Authority. (2019). Injury deaths and rates, by manner, sex and age. Retrieved from https://visual-data.dhsoha.state.or.us/t/OHA/views/Oregondeathsfromexternalinjuries/DemogDash?:showAppBanner=false&:display_count=n&:showVizHome=n&:origin=viz_share_link&:isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&:embed=y
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- ⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2019). *WISQARS Fatal Injury Reports, Ages 10-24, Percent Change: 2009 to 2018*. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC.
- ⁸ Everytown Research and Policy. (2020). *The Rise of Firearm Suicide Among Young Americans*. Retrieved from [everytownresearch.org](https://www.everytownresearch.org)
- ⁹ American Academy of Pediatrics. (n.d.). *Addressing Gun Violence: The State Level*. Retrieved from [aap.org](https://www.aap.org)
- ¹⁰ Giffords Law Center. (2020). *Safe Storage*. Retrieved from [giffords.org](https://www.giffords.org)
- ¹¹ World Health Organization. (2016). *INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children*. Retrieved from [who.int](https://www.who.int)
- ¹² Hamilton, E., Miller, C. Cox, C., Lally, K. & Austin, M. (2018). Variability of child access prevention laws and pediatric firearm injuries. *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*, 84(4), 613-619. Doi: 10.1097/TA.0000000000001786
- ¹³ Monuteaux, M., Azrael, D. & Miller, M. (2019). Association of increased safe household firearm storage with firearm suicide and unintentional death among US youths. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 173(7), 657-662. Doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1078
- ¹⁴ Rowhani-Rahbar, A., Simonetti, J. & Rivara, F. (2016). Effectiveness of interventions to promote safe firearm storage. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, 38, 111-124. Doi: 10.1093/epirev/mxv006
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- ¹⁹ Oregon Health Authority. (n.d.). *Public Health's Role: Oregon Firearm Legislation*. Retrieved from [oregon.gov/oha](https://www.oregon.gov/oha)