

Thank you for the opportunity to share written testimony in support of HB2510. My name is Sylvia Banks. Because I feel that far too many children are losing their lives to preventable gun deaths, I am a passionate advocate for gun violence prevention.

I was blessed with 7 beautiful grandchildren, six of which are living. Micheal took his own life when he was just 10 years old. Micheal would have been 15 years old this July. He had the most beautiful smile, so much like his mothers'. He was a bright, caring, compassionate kid, one of the top students in his class. He also loved basketball and baseball. He was a well-rounded, engaged, happy kid. Three weeks before his death, he took Jesus into his life. The day before, he was voted most valuable player and given the team ball after his little league game. Nothing would have led anyone to believe that Micheal was a suicide risk!

My son and daughter-in-law felt they had done everything right. They spent many hours teaching their children about gun safety, to treat guns with respect, that they were very dangerous and should never be touched unless in the presence of an adult. By keeping a loaded gun on a top shelf in their closet, they felt they were protecting their family from a potential intruder. Little did they know that the harm to their family would come from within. Despite all of the careful admonishments never to go into the closet, my 10-year old grandson did just that, took the gun and turned it on himself. We can only guess at the reason. Was it a moment of desperation after having a bad day?

My son's family has been devastated by Micheal's death. Three of Micheal's siblings found him after he shot himself. Two were younger than him. They've had trouble sleeping for the longest time and could not stay alone at night. The youngest child, Jamie, couldn't stand to be alone at all, even to go to the bathroom or shower for the first 6 months after Micheal died. Micheal's mother is suffering from depression and anxiety, which are manifesting in other physical ailments. It breaks my heart to see them suffer so, especially my daughter-in-law!

I joined Moms Demand Action to honor Micheal's memory and to fight to save other families from having to endure the same trauma that my family has endured. I am appalled at the incidence of gun violence in our country compared to the rest of the developed world. We can do better! One thing we can do is to enhance safe storage laws, which has been proven to save lives. Suicide is the leading cause of death among teens and children. Access to a loaded gun increases a child's risk of dying by gun violence by three times.

Oregon has the fastest-growing firearm suicide rate among young people in the country, 124% over the last decade. There is a popular misconception that suicide is inevitable. But that is false—suicide is usually impulsive and a decision made in a moment of crisis. Most people who attempt suicide do not die—unless they use a gun. Across all suicide attempts not involving a firearm, 4 percent will result in death. But for gun suicide, those statistics are flipped: Approximately 90 percent of gun suicide attempts end in death. If Micheal didn't have access to that loaded gun, he would be here today!

Please join me in my fight to prevent those who shouldn't have access to guns by voting for the safe storage of firearms. Please vote yes for HB2510.

Thank you.