

An Appeal from the Bush Park Neighborhood in Salem

SUPPORT SENATE BILL 554

Dear Members of the House Committee on Rules,

Last October a large group of Proud Boys gathered at Bush Park, near our homes in Salem. Men carrying assault rifles and semi-automatic weapons threatened and followed people. Volunteers picking up litter on park trails were frightened, and many families packed up their picnics and left.

To our dismay, Salem police officers were prevented from removing these men who, in essence, took over the park. Because of our state preemption laws, open carry is permitted on any public property, and towns and cities are restricted from passing local regulations that would prohibit gun carrying in their public libraries, schools, colleges, parks or downtown squares. State law preempts local law. For our neighborhood, what that means is that groups are free to roam our local park with assault rifles, creating fear among children and families.

Oregon was listed as one of five states most at risk for militia activity, and militia violence in Salem, where we live, has been featured in *Newsweek*, *Business Insider*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, FOX News, CNN News, ABC News, NBC News, CBS News, Yahoo, MSN, *Salon*, *The Guardian* (UK), *The Daily Mail* (UK) and other news outlets around the world. These news stories and videos about Salem highlight militia violence gone unchecked, innocent bystanders harmed, and people driven from public spaces that have been commandeered by groups carrying military-style weapons.

Many Oregon cities and towns are working with business owners to restore or create vibrant downtowns after a devastating year. They are attempting to repair city budgets after horrendous wildfires, a brutal ice storm, and a year of Covid. And they are working to create safe, welcoming communities. These efforts will end in failure if they are undermined by disorder in our streets and citizens who are demoralized and intimidated by violence in our public spaces.

Oregon's current preemption law is a one-size-fits-all law that does not take into account the wide variety of needs and dispositions of people around the state. Cities and towns should be allowed to respond to violent situations by enacting common-sense gun laws that will keep their citizens safe. We strongly urge you to support SB 554. Thank you.

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