



# Native American Youth and Family Center

5135 NE Columbia Blvd, Portland, OR 97218 | p 503.288.8177 | f 503.288.1260 | nayapdx.org

April 21, 2021

To: Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chair Drazan, Vice-Chair Holvey, and Members of the House Committee on Rules

RE: SB 554-A: Support

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chair Drazan, Vice-Chair Holvey, and Members of the Committee For the record, my name is William Miller, I am Blackfeet and Cherokee and I represent the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) located in Portland, Oregon. NAYA's wraparound programs directly serve over 2,000 individual Native American youth, adults, and Elders every year and positively impacts more than 10,000 Native Americans living in Portland's growing Native American community. I am writing today in support of Senate Bill 554.

Gun violence is an all too pervasive reality for the impacted communities of the Portland area. The legacies of systemic racism leave BIPOC communities more vulnerable to the patterns of gun violence and with less confidence in the institutions intended to protect public safety. During the period of 2013-2017, 13.9 out of every 100,000 American Indian/Alaska Native Oregonians lost their lives to gun violence annually – the highest rate for any ethnicity in the state according to the Oregon Health Authority. We support legislative action to provide thoughtful, constructive ways to address this challenge.

The safe gun storage proposal contained in SB 554 offers an effective approach to policy making, with the intended goal of encouraging responsible behaviors rather than a punitive approach that can exacerbate the underlying racial inequities in our criminal justice system. Unlike safe storage laws in other states, this bill does not create new misdemeanor or felony crimes, instead creating civil fines for violations. It is intended to reinforce steps that many gun owners already take to ensure their weapons do not end up in the wrong hands.

Safe storage also contributes to preventing suicides with a gun. A "means matter" strategy that delays the time it takes a person to access a gun, research finds this reduces the chance that someone will take their own life. It also helps ensure a firearm does not end up in the hands of a child or other family member with suicidal ideation. According to the Oregon Health Authority, from 2013-2017 19.3 out of every 100,000 American Indian/Alaska Native Oregonians took their own life each year – the second highest rate of any ethnicity in the state. And firearms continue to be the means employed by a majority of Oregonians in suicide attempts.



# Native American Youth and Family Center

5135 NE Columbia Blvd, Portland, OR 97218 | p 503.288.8177 | f 503.288.1260 | [nayapdx.org](http://nayapdx.org)

Gun violence is a daily tragedy in Oregon and every indication is that the COVID-19 pandemic has made this reality worse. We urge you to act now to take the steps outlined in SB 554 to address gun violence in our state. Delaying or deferring these actions will have a real toll in human lives.

On behalf of the Native American Youth and Family Center we urge the passage of Senate Bill 554, for the overall health, safety, and wellbeing of our communities.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Miller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "William" being more prominent than the last name "Miller".

William Miller