



Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: April 22, 2021

TO: Chair Smith Warner and members of the House Committee on Rules

FROM: Jimmy Unger, MD, MPH, FAAP
Oregon Pediatric Society Member

SUBJECT: Support for SB 554-A

For the record, my name is Dr. Jimmy Unger. I'm a member of the Oregon Pediatric Society and the American Academy of Pediatrics. OPS strongly endorsed HB 2510, which would save children's lives and injury from accidental or intentional gun use, and supports SB 554 with the safe gun storage amendments.

My approximately 40 years of Pediatric practice (25 of which were in Eugene and Portland), and my personal experience as a father of two and a grandfather of two, qualifies me as an "expert" on how and why children behave the way they do. One of the main tasks of a Pediatrician is to prevent serious injury and death, and that's why I'm submitting this testimony.

Both toddlers and teens would both benefit from this bill's passage. These two seemingly disparate groups act impulsively, as if ignorant or unaware of their action's risks, including death. Developmentally speaking, these traits are ingrained and incorrigible. That explains why, in a household with firearms, the only barrier to a toddler picking up a gun and wreaking havoc or a depressed teen dying of suicide is a safely stored firearm.

I'm reminded of a 16-year-old patient of mine—a victim of multiple gunshot wounds from one of his peers' improperly stored firearms. The amazing medical team saved his life, but not his badly damaged spinal cord or bowel. He is likely wheelchair-bound, and to have an ostomy for the rest of his life. Imagine facing all of this at age 16.

The well-intentioned opponents of the bill believe the bill is anti-gun, anti-2nd Amendment, and that all that is needed to save lives is education/public awareness. Similar arguments were used against bills like car seat laws, speed limits, bike helmet laws. What, in fact, these great pieces of legislation have in common is their recognition of a serious threat to public health. Driven by actual data, those policymakers—like this bill's authors—crafted policy that, despite intense opposition, not only saved lots of lives, but ultimately met with public acceptance. This bill is no more anti-gun than a speed limit is anti-car. These bills are alike in that they all require that something that many of us love, a potential instrument of death, is used responsibly.

There are other kids like my adolescent patient and adults like Cindy Yuille and Steve Forsyth out there whose safety depends on passage of this bill. Please remember that the only alternative to safe gun storage is unsafe or dangerous gun storage. I urge you to pass SB 554A.

Thank you for your public service.