

My name is Marina Seidl and I am a high schooler in Portland, Oregon. I support the bill HB-2543. The Charleston loophole allows thousands of guns every year to slip into the hands of domestic abusers, violent criminals, and other people who should not have access to guns. Lawmakers need to prioritize passing HB 2543 — closing the deadly “Charleston Loophole” which allows a gun sale to proceed if the background check takes longer than three business days.

No gun should ever be sold without a complete background check.

Background checks are the basis of who has access to guns and strict laws and regulations are essential to prevent the horrible effects of gun violence on schools, families and communities. This loophole has always been deadly, but it's likely gotten even worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Oregon background check system is currently overwhelmed during the pandemic and it's more important than ever to make sure that people who shouldn't have firearms aren't able to bypass the background check system.

In Oregon, approximately 97% of background checks are resolved within minutes. However, in 3% of cases, background check operators need more time to determine if a person can legally purchase a firearm. 3% does not seem like a substantial amount but it is estimated that at least 585,000 background checks will have taken longer than three business days in 2020. This is unacceptable and lawmakers need to focus on closing this loophole—by doing so Oregon would join at least 19 other states and D.C. who give background check operators additional time to complete background checks on potential gun buyers. Preventing firearms from falling into the hands of people who should not have access to them is essential to keeping our communities safe.

The loophole takes its name from the 2015 shooting of nine worshipers at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where the shooter, though legally prohibited from having a firearm, was able to buy the gun he used in the shooting because his background check was not completed within three business days. This white man filled with hate and armed with a gun murdered nine black people in Charleston while they prayed. They were killed by the same hate, racism, systemic inequality, and lack of gun safety laws that kill black people every day in this country. This was unacceptable—no gun should be sold without a completed background check, and what happened at Mother Emanuel must never be allowed to happen again.

Preventing such a tragedy as the 2015 shooting can start by passing this bill in order to save the lives of innocent people. Tens of thousands more prohibited buyers are trying to buy guns: Last year there were twice as many cases of prohibited buyers trying to get guns from dealers. There is still more work to be done to strengthen our country's gun laws and law enforcement should be given the time it needs to investigate the small number of cases with complex criminal histories – because in those cases it could save lives.

It is for these reasons and statistics that I think passing this bill could be the next step for gun reform in Oregon in 2021. Making sure background checks are completed and firearms do not fall into the hands of people who should not have them can be prevented with HB-2543. It is our duty as citizens of this state and country to do as much as we can to keep our communities, children and citizens safe from harm caused by gun violence.

HB-2543 needs to be passed.