

Testimony in support of HB2543

My name is Rebecca Cohen. I am a mother, step-mother, business owner, and longtime gun violence prevention advocate in Portland. I submit my testimony in support of HB2543, which will help protect Oregonians from gun violence.

Gun violence shatters families and communities. I know this first-hand, because I experienced it at age 14. I was in the 8th grade. It was a spring morning, and I was getting ready for school. The phone rang, and suddenly I heard a piercing, anguished scream from my mother. This was how I learned that my Uncle Alan had been shot by a disgruntled employee and left to die. The news was incongruous. It made no sense. The words 'Uncle Alan' and 'Shot to Death' had no business sharing a sentence.

My Uncle Alan was murdered in 1984 – almost 37 years ago. But I still think about him almost every day, wondering how the lives of his children, stepchildren, grandchildren, nieces & nephews might be different if he were still alive. And every two years, I write a letter to the New York State Parole Board urging the continued detention of his murderer.

Those who oppose passing common sense gun safety laws often make the argument that no single law would have stopped the shooting at Clackamas Town Center or Umpqua Community College; they wouldn't have stopped the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School; they may not have even stopped my uncle's murder.

This is one case that disproves that argument. Had the Charleston Loophole not existed, the Mother Emanuel shooter would not have been able to obtain a gun, and the nine parishoners who were murdered that day would still be with us.

Most background checks are resolved within minutes, but currently, with gun sales surging during the pandemic, it's more common for background checks to take longer than three days. How many guns are ending up in the hands of prohibited buyers during this period of unprecedented stress on the system?

Those of us working for sensible gun safety legislation don't harbor fantasies that any one piece of legislation will retroactively undo all past tragedies. We have no illusion we can magically bring back our lost loved ones. We work to pass gun safety legislation because we want to spare other families from receiving that dreadful phone call. We advocate for gun safety because we know that it will reduce the number of injuries, suicides, and murders committed with guns.

Closing the Charleston Loophole will not stop every gun crime or save every life. But it will reduce gun crime and save many lives. It's past time for Oregon to join the 19 other states and DC, who have given background check operators the time they need to complete background checks on gun buyers. Please vote YES on HB2543.

Thank you.

Rebecca Cohen

Portland, OR