



DATE: February 18, 2021
TO: House Judiciary Committee, Chair Bynum and Members
FROM: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations
RE: **HB 2543** [*Closing the Charleston Loophole*]

On behalf of OEA's 41,000 members, it is my honor to testify today in support of HB 2543, which would close a loophole in Oregon's gun violence prevention laws, to keep our state's people safer.

There are two reasons for our advocacy for this legislation: first and foremost, we believe that the state has an interest in striking a balance between the public's right to protection from gun violence on one hand and gun buyers' and sellers' right to timely transactions on the other. When, on occasion, the National Instant Criminal Background Checks System (NICS) cannot complete background checks so "instantly", we should be patient. After all, the entire premise of background checks – to minimize the risk that dangerous, prohibited purchasers will be able to obtain guns – is undermined if a sale is allowed to occur without this safety measure.

Our second reason for supporting this bill, which has already been passed by nine other states, is that the pandemic has put significant pressure on the infrastructure of background checks due to a drastic surge in 2020 firearm purchasing. With the onset of COVID-19 closures and lockdowns, Oregonians obtained an unprecedented number of guns in 2020, which strained an already under-resourced background check system.

As the Center for American Progress has pointed out, "The Charleston loophole turned what should have been a simple administrative inconvenience during the pandemic into a potential public health emergency."

This bill, recognizing that fact, enables our system to catch up and recover from the surge without compromising public safety.

Our schools have – until the pandemic – been the sites of too many gun violence incidents in recent years; so many that active-shooter drills have become standard in our schools. Our members regularly plan, they tell us, how they will protect their students, should the day come, and be prepared to sacrifice themselves to save their kids. HB 2543 says to these educators that Oregon's legislature considers the safety of their students, their schools, and their communities as taking precedence over firearm commerce.

We urge this committee to move HB 2543 to the floor with a do-pass recommendation. Thank you.