

Date: 2/20/2021

To: Chair Prozanski and vice-chair Thatcher

My name is Travis Laxton, PhD

I come before you in opposition to Senate Bill 554.

I am native Oregonian and have lived in Oregon most of my life. I do not have any criminal charges or convictions on my record, and if my memory is correct, do not even have a traffic ticket. Over the last year or more I have observed increasing societal unrest and group violence most notably in Portland to my north but also in many other cities. For many years I have owned hunting rifles and shotguns but never a pistol. Due to the increasing unrest and instability in our society my wife and I, along with many Oregonians, have recently chosen to purchase handguns for personal and home defense. We are also planning on taking a class and applying for our Concealed Carry License which will be the first time either of us have ever had a CCL. Although we do not plan on carrying a pistol with us at all times, we would like to have the option to carry one concealed in certain locations or situations.

My first question for the committee is what data or evidence indicate a problem for those carrying weapons with a CCL license? I do not see any problem statement or evidence for a problem noted in the bill. I looked up the Stats of The State of Oregon on the CDC website. Based on the most recent data from 2017 Oregon's Firearm Deaths were 528 with a rate of 12.1 per thousand. This is statistically the same as the national rate of 12.0. The 2017 Suicide death rate was 825 with a rate of 19.0 per thousand, which is higher than the U.S. rate of 14.0 per thousand. Although the data does not separate out the causes of firearm death rates, firearms are frequently used in suicides. Therefore, it is likely that the Firearms Deaths of 528 also includes suicide deaths and not just homicides or accidental deaths. It appears that firearm use for suicide is a much bigger problem in Oregon than firearms carried by CCL holders. Although there may be significant problems associated with individuals who carry concealed firearms with a CCL there does not appear to be any data to substantiate this. If my government is going to restrict my rights then I want my government to provide strong and compelling evidence for the need to do so. I do not see any evidence either in the bill or CDC statistics that would support SB 554's further restriction of lawful Concealed Carry. If anything, there is evidence that those individuals licensed for concealed carry have passed more thorough background checks and taken more training than lawful handgun owners who are not licensed for concealed carry. I would rather encourage more training and a more thorough background check if people are going to carry guns in public rather than less training and background checks.

I am concerned about the expansion and patchwork of locations that would prohibit both the lawful concealed handgun carry and the carrying of common self-defense "weapons" including mace, pepper spray, and stun guns. The current legal definition of a weapon (ORS 166.360) includes both fire arms and common defensive devices which many people, especially women, carry and do not consider to be in the same class as a fire arm. Based on this common understanding and belief that things like pepper spray or mace are not weapons means that even with posted signs stating no weapons, people will unintentionally commit a felony. The inconsistent patchwork of locations that allow or do not allow weapons will also make it very hard for otherwise law-abiding individuals to understand and comply with these laws and will essentially catch or trap otherwise law-abiding citizens and charge them with felonies. Is it the intent or in the best interest of the legislature to set traps of confusion and inconsistencies to charge Oregonians with felonies?

A primary example of this is the expansion of the prohibited locations to include the airport passenger terminal. An example would be an individual driving to the airport to pick up a relative from the passenger terminal. Even if the person did not get out of his or her car and had a weapon in the car that person could be charged with a felony for no other reason than she had an otherwise lawful weapon in her car. The weapon would be lawful on the drive to the airport terminal, lawful on the drive away from the terminal, but not lawful when the car pulls into the passenger terminal. As I read this law, even if the person picking up a relative from the airport terminal was trying to comply with the law by unloading and locking his firearm in a locked box in the car before arriving, he would still be committing a felony.

If the Oregon legislature believes that there is a compelling government interest to restrict the number of public places that individuals may carry weapons, fire arm or otherwise, then why doesn't the legislature just pass a law that applies consistently across the state? This would be more consistent and transparent than this law. The only reasons I can see for allowing individual buildings and groups to make their own rules is either because there is not consensus that it is needed and therefore such a bill will not pass or the real motivation is to create confusion and inconsistency to trap otherwise law-abiding Oregonians and charge them with felonies. Whether one or both of these motives are true it is clear that SB 554 is highly likely to result in many more Oregonians unwittingly committing and being charged with felonies for simply exercising their Constitutional right to self-defense. This law will do nothing to deter criminals and will only make criminals out of otherwise law-abiding Oregonians. Is that the intent of this legislature?

In summary, I urge the committee to oppose and kill SB 554. It will do nothing to improve public safety, will not address illegal gun use and will most certainly increase the felony conviction rate of Oregonians.

Thank you for your time and consideration.