

Senate Committee on Education
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

March 6, 2023

Dear Chair Dembrow and Honorable Members of the Committee,

We write to you as members of and leaders in Oregon's faith communities. We are proud to say that Oregon is a leader in the secure storage of firearms, and were glad that the legislature passed SB 554 in 2021 requiring all firearm owners to keep their guns locked.

However, there is more that can be done to protect the lives of our children and others who are at risk from unsecured firearms. Specifically, we believe that SB 551 in this year's session represents an important step in amplifying the impact of Oregon's secure storage law by requiring that K-12 schools send home information on how to safely store both firearms and prescription drugs. This will ensure that parents of students have the most up-to-date information and remind them of the importance of protecting their children and others in their community from unsecured weapons.

Nationally, only 35 percent of child gun deaths are suicides; but in Oregon, 63 percent of all child gun deaths are suicides. Putting time and space between lethal means and a young person experiencing crisis is proven to reduce the risk of suicide, and the vast majority of those who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide. Encouraging households to keep their guns locked up can help keep young people alive during what is often a temporary crisis so they can get the help they need. In 2022, guns surpassed car accidents as the leading cause of death for American children and teens. We need to do our part to bring that number down.

As religious leaders in Oregon, we see the effects of violence, including gun violence, firsthand. We are the ones who bury the dead, mourn with and console survivors, pray for the injured and afflicted, and work to bring peace to our communities. Sharing information with households about securely storing their firearms is an easy, common-sense solution to save lives.

(continued)

We urge you to pass SB 551 into law. Thank you for your consideration, and we are praying for you as you lead our state.

Sincerely,

Reverend Ryan Baker-Fones
St. Mary's Episcopal Church
Eugene, Oregon

Deacon Bonnie Beadles-Bohling
Central Lutheran Church
Portland, Oregon

Rev. Celine A. Burke
The Episcopal Church
Bend, Oregon

Rabbi Michael Z. Cahana
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Deacon Daniel Carlson
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*Affiliations are for identification purposes only.
Signatures continue on the next page.*

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