

Submitter: Brandy Steelhammer
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB551

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Education

I'm writing to you as a life-long Oregonian, a mother, a social worker, and as a gun violence survivor who has lost 5 people I care about to gun violence. All five of these deaths occurred in Oregon. I am writing to urge your support of SB 551. Firearms are the leading cause of death for American children and teens (source: Nat'l Institutes of Health, American Academy of Pediatrics). That fact, coupled with the reality that the United States has approximately 400 million guns in circulation, along with countless more ghost guns that cannot be traced and can be 3D printed, means that adults must do all they can to keep guns out of the hands of children and teens, as well as those who may steal an unsecured gun to harm others.

Research has shown that 3/4 of school shooters under the age of 18 got their gun from their home, the home of a relative or friend. Each year, nearly 350 children unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else with an unsecured gun, with 77% of these incidents happening inside a home. And nearly 600 children die of firearm suicide each year, with the majority using a family member's gun (source: Everytown Research).

In 2014, a Bend High School student used a gun to die by suicide in their classroom, in front of classmates. The ripple effect of gun violence trauma is huge. I know that from my own devastating experiences. What most people don't know is that firearm suicide is preventable. Most people who attempt suicide survive their attempt when a gun is not present. Moreover, most people who survive a suicide attempt do not attempt again, contrary to popular myth (<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/>). When guns are securely stored, lives are saved from suicide, unintentional shootings, and homicide.

The Deschutes County Suicide Data Report 2000-2017 showed that the youth suicide rate nearly doubled in that time period. The report states, "Schools play an integral role in helping prevent youth suicide." It goes on to say "Suicide can be avoided if someone does not have an easy way to act on suicidal impulses during their most vulnerable moments - safe storage, such as prescription lock boxes or gun safes, is key to helping prevent suicide." In addition it says "Safe storage efforts should include approaches for firearms as well as prescription medications, as these are the most widely used methods to die by suicide in Deschutes County." Moreover it says "Efforts should also target firearm owners in a culturally responsive manner. Engaging with firearm owners on effective approaches for safe storage is imperative

to mitigating risks of suicide by firearm."

(https://www.deschutes.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/health_services/page/14391/deschutes_county_suicide_report_2020.pdf)

SB 551 will save lives. Educating parents about the safe storage of firearms, and how this can prevent suicide, unintentional shootings, and guns being stolen to use in homicides, is key to helping reduce firearm deaths among youth in Oregon. Please support this important bill. Our children are counting on state leaders, and the adults in their lives, to protect them. Their lives depend on it.

Respectfully,

Brandy Steelhammer, LCSW

Bend, OR resident