

Date: February 7th, 2024

To: Sen. Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Sen. Kim Thatcher, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Alisha Overstreet, M.S. Forensic Psychology

Re: SB-1503 Community Safety and Firearm Suicide Prevention Task Force

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and members of the committee, my name is Alisha Overstreet and I write this testimony today to OPPOSE SB-1503.

My background is in public policy, civil rights advocacy from the perspective of those most affected by unjust and discriminatory policies and statutes, forensic psychology, advocacy in the areas of disability and mental health, as well as a deep appreciation and passion regarding constitutional law and history.

My sense is that regardless of how many Oregonians provide written and verbal testimony in opposition to the creation of this task force, politics and personal bias against the constitutionally protected right to bear arms will likely prevail over any authentic willingness to address the problem at hand – access to mental services, stigma surrounding mental health services, and capacity expansion of a culturally and linguistically appropriate workforce in Oregon.

With that said, the following is my written testimony in opposition to the creation of this task force.

“In September 2023, President Biden established the first-ever White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention¹,” and in December 2023, Vice President Harris launched the “Biden-Harris Administration’s Safer States Initiative to provide states with additional tools and the support they need to reduce gun violence and save lives².”

The theme and focus of the Safer States Agenda are clear:

- Enact and implement Extreme Risk Protection Orders which do not provide appropriate due process for individuals whose otherwise constitutionally protected right cannot be violated.
- Reinforce *Responsible* Gun Ownership through subjective and highly biased legal requirements which criminalize otherwise constitutionally protected gun ownership, purchase, use, and firearm transfers. (see *Heller v. D.C.*; *McDonald v. City of Chicago*; *Caetano v. Massachusetts*, as well as *NYSRPA v. Bruen*)
- Banning so-called “assault weapons.”
 - Note: Despite SCOTUS’ denial to hear several major cases since their *Heller* and *McDonald* decisions (until *Bruen* in 2022), the dissenting opinion in *Friedman v. City of Highland Park* (2015) provide a clear reference to the affirmation that semi-automatic firearms are constitutionally protected arms.

None of which have been proven, without biased and misconstrued data, to prevent or alleviate suicides.

Justice Thomas and Justice Scalia were clear:

*“[O]ur central holding in” District of Columbia v. Heller, [554 U. S. 570 \(2008\)](#), was “that the [Second Amendment](#) protects a personal right to keep and bear arms for lawful purposes, most notably for self-defense within the home.” McDonald v. Chicago, [561 U. S. 742](#), 780 (2010) (plurality opinion). And in McDonald, we recognized that the [Second Amendment](#) applies fully against the States as well as the Federal Government. *Id.*, at 750; *id.*, at 805 (Thomas, J., concurring in part and concurring in judgment).*

Despite these holdings, several Courts of Appeals—including the Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in the decision below—have upheld categorical bans on firearms that millions of Americans commonly own for lawful purposes. See [784 F. 3d 406](#), 410–412 (2015). Because *noncompliance with our [Second Amendment](#) precedents* warrants this Court’s attention as much as any of our precedents, I would grant certiorari in this case.

Having said this, I would be remiss if I did not express my agreement with the overall sentiment of the bill, namely, the desire to:

- Better support youth experiencing suicidal ideation,
- Better support rural Oregonians experiencing suicidal ideation,
- Reducing the stigma on suicidal ideation,
- Addressing the barriers to suicide prevention support, and
- Study intervention protocols related to gun violence.

However, all of these can already be done in currently existing workgroups, committees, and councils the state already convenes with currently available resources and data.

For example, the Oregon Health Authority already houses the [Oregon Violent Death Reporting System \(ORVDRS\)](#) which tracks suicides, homicides, homicide-

suicide incidents, and use of firearms in those incidents. OHA already provides statistics around suicides, including demographic information relevant to the discussion around suicide prevalence, trends, and associated factors, as well as suicides among Oregon veterans, which can all be used to inform stigma on suicidal ideation.

Taking into account the level of involvement by special interest groups as well as this bill giving authority to the Governor to appoint members to the task force, there are serious concerns.

None of the proposed members on this task force include pro-2A firearms research experts, gun store owners, nor gun owners or organizations with expressed interest in upholding this constitutionally protected right while also wanting to support mental health efforts.

If the state of Oregon is serious and authentic about significantly reducing suicide rates, then this Task Force is not the answer!

Thank you for your time.

Alisha Overstreet, M.S., Forensic Psychology