

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

I am writing today in support of SB 1503, the Task Force bill on gun violence prevention and firearm suicide prevention.

I am an 82 year old father, step-father and grandfather. I grew up in rural North Carolina and West Virginia around guns and hunting. My father served in the SeaBees as a Chaplain in the South Pacific during WW II and my uncle served in Europe as a tank commander.

I have been distressed at how the use of guns has been use as a political wedge issue and has created hatred and division among our fellow citizens. We all need to try to de-escalate the heat around this issue and to pass reasonable safety measures that can protect the lives of the innocent.

I have lost a stepson, Matthew, to gun violence on September 4, 2008, a date burned in my memory from the call from a police officer to tell me that Matt was dead. He was only 23 years old and he had two young sons. I am writing for them more than for myself. I will not be on this earth much longer but they have heir whole lives ahead of them. It would be good for them to live in a safer world.

Every year, we lose close to 600 Oregonians to preventable firearm deaths. Black Oregonians are roughly 10 times more likely than white people to die by firearm homicide. And the firearm suicide rate in rural Oregon is 2.5 times higher than in urban areas and the state's veteran suicide rate is 37% higher than the national average.

I strongly support the SB1503, Task Force bill, and urge the Task Force to prioritize prevention efforts that are centered around those most impacted by gun deaths and shootings, as well as firearm suicides. I urge the Task Force to analyze and prioritize ongoing, sustainable funding for efforts for prevention work that is making the most meaningful, equitable impact, both for homicide and suicide prevention.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony on this issue.

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