

Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church

3138 No. Vancouver Ave., Portland, OR 97227

Phone: (503) 282-9496 Fax: (503) 284-6073

Rev. Dr. J.W. Matt Hennessee, M.Div.; D.D.; Senior Servant

www.vafbc.org www.facebook.com/vafbc vafbchurch1@aol.com

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Board of Deacons*

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*Mr. Ethan Lewellen, Chair
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Wednesday, February 7, 2024

The Honorable Floyd Prozanski
Oregon State Senate, Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 9731

Re: Testimony Supporting SB 1503

Dear Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rev. Dr. J.W. Matt Hennessee. I approach you as a father, grandfather, faith leader, and inter-faith leader. For the past 19 years I have served as the Senior Pastor of the historic Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church in Portland.

My purpose in writing to you is to support SB 1503, the Task Force bill on gun violence prevention and firearm suicide prevention.

For several years I have been a proponent, as godson of Mrs. Coretta Scott King, of discouraging the plentiful access to guns. Statistics reveal that the presence of guns and irresponsible storage and use of guns lead to risks in our communities that often lead to injuries and, unfortunately, death. Guns are not the answer to resolve conflict, people need better negotiating tools to do so.

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.

My passion for this Bill is also because my family and I have lost a family member to gun violence in May 2021. I would urge you to consider what can be done to provide better tools of conflict resolution so that guns become a last resort and

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

Sincerely,

J.W. Matt Hennessee

J.W. Matt Hennessee,
Senior Pastor