



February 7, 2024

Senate Committee on Judiciary

The Honorable Sen. Floyd Prozanski, Chair  
The Honorable Sen. Kim Thatcher, Vice Chair

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

Our names are Joel Burnett, MD, FACP and Ben Hoffman, MD, FAAP. We are physicians and firearm injury prevention educators at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and members of the Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue (GVPHI) Initiative, a collaborative effort from OHSU and Portland State University (PSU) composed of community members, educators, healthcare professionals, and students working to prevent firearm injury and death using a public health approach. Dr. Burnett is an assistant professor and internal medicine physician practicing primary care for adults at OHSU. He is Co-Chair of the Health & Public Policy Committee for the Oregon Chapter of the American College of Physicians. Dr. Hoffman is a pediatrician at Doernbecher Children's Hospital at OHSU, is Vice-Chair for Community Health and Advocacy for the Department of Pediatrics, is the Medical Director of the Tom Sargent Safety Center at OHSU. He is a nationally recognized expert in child injury prevention, past- Chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention, and current President of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

With the support of OHSU, we write in strong support of SB1503.

### **The impact of firearm injury and suicide in Oregon**

Firearm injury is an ongoing public health crisis. In 2022, 656 Oregonians died from firearm injury; suicides accounted for 477 (72.4%) of these deaths.<sup>i</sup> Firearm injury in Oregon affects all demographics and all corners of our state. According to OHA data, 55 of Oregon's children and young adults (age 5-24) died by firearm suicide in 2022.<sup>i</sup> Homicide took the lives of 31 children and young adults in 2022.<sup>i</sup> These deaths are tragic. They also represent only part of the firearm injury crisis. In the United States, for every person killed by firearms at least two more are wounded.<sup>ii</sup> Data from the OHA shows that that firearm injury impacts counties across the state of Oregon (figure 1).<sup>iii</sup> Although all groups of people are affected by firearm injury, communities of color are disproportionately affected.<sup>iii</sup> Rural communities are disproportionately affected by firearm suicide.<sup>iv</sup>

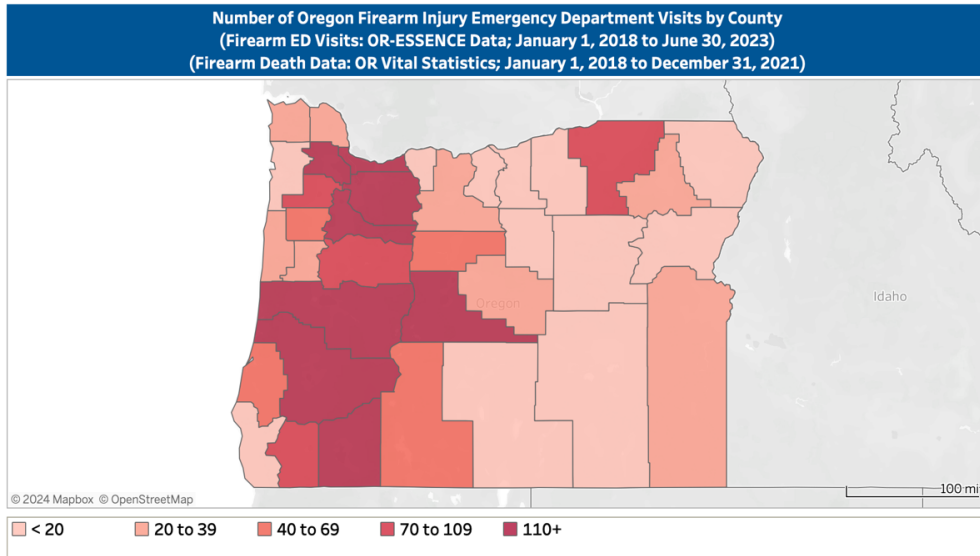


Figure 1. Number of Oregon Firearm Injury ER Visits by County (Jan 1, 2018-June 30, 2023)

Since the year 2000, Oregon’s suicides rate (19.5/100,000 people) has been higher than the national average (14/100,000).<sup>v</sup> Firearms were the most common mechanism of suicide, and the rate of firearm suicide is increasing (figure 2).<sup>v</sup> Fortunately, overall, most people who attempt suicide will survive. National data shows that only 8.5% of suicide attempts are fatal; however, when firearms are involved, 89.6% of suicide attempts are fatal.<sup>vi</sup> This is why firearms account for more than half of all suicide deaths in Oregon.

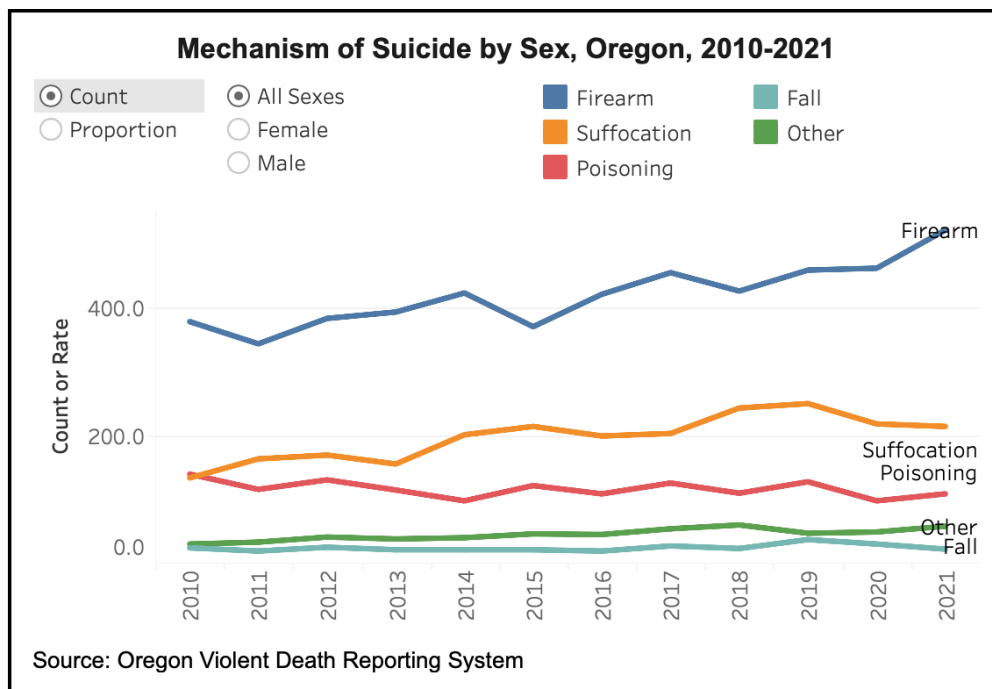


Figure 2. Mechanism of Suicide in Oregon for all Sexes, 2010-2021

## **An opportunity to reduce firearm injury in Oregon**

As physicians, we understand that our success caring for patients is only as good as our data. We strive to make decisions based on the best available evidence. Data drives everything – from how we understand a problem to how we work to treat or prevent it. We urge you to adopt a similar approach to policy by passing SB 1503, which will a) create a task force to study issues related to public health best practices for reducing firearm injury and death, and b) provide money for research on firearm injury and firearm injury prevention. In the interest of the health and well-being of Oregonians, we urge you to vote yes on SB 1503.

Sincerely,



Joel Burnett, MD, FACP; Assistant Professor of Medicine, OHSU; Co-Chair, Health & Public Policy Committee for the Oregon Chapter of the American College of Physicians; Member, OHSU Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue (GVPHI) Advisory Committee



Ben Hoffman, MD, FAAP; Professor of Pediatrics, OHSU; Vice-Chair for Community Health and Advocacy for the Department of Pediatrics, OHSU; Medical Director of the Tom Sargent Safety Center at OHSU; President, American Academy of Pediatrics; Member, OHSU, Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue (GVPHI) Advisory Committee

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<sup>i</sup> Oregon Health Authority, Center for Health Statistics. Injury deaths by manner, sex, age and race, 2022. Accessed February 5, 2024. [https://visual-data.dhsoha.state.or.us/t/OHA/views/Oregondeathsfromexternalinjuries/DemogDash?%3AshowAppBanner=false%3Adisplay\\_count=n%3AshowVizHome=n%3Aorigin=viz\\_share\\_link%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y%3Aembed=y](https://visual-data.dhsoha.state.or.us/t/OHA/views/Oregondeathsfromexternalinjuries/DemogDash?%3AshowAppBanner=false%3Adisplay_count=n%3AshowVizHome=n%3Aorigin=viz_share_link%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y%3Aembed=y)

<sup>ii</sup> Schnippel K, Burd-Sharps S, Miller TR, Lawrence BA, Swedler DI. Nonfatal Firearm Injuries by Intent in the United States: 2016-2018 Hospital Discharge Records from the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project. *West J Emerg Med*. 2021 May 21;22(3):462-470. doi: 10.5811/westjem.2021.3.51925

<sup>iii</sup> Oregon Health Authority. The Oregon FASTER Project Data Dashboard. September 30, 2023. Accessed February 5, 2024. <https://visual-data.dhsoha.state.or.us/t/OHA/views/FASTER1000/ExtendedDashboard?%3Aiid=2%3Aembed=y>

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<sup>iv</sup> Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division, Injury and Violence Prevention. Firearm Safety: Firearms and Suicide.

Accessed February 5, 2024. <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PREVENTIONWELLNESS/SAFELIVING/Pages/Firearm-Safety.aspx>

<sup>v</sup> Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Violent Death Reporting System (ORVDRS). Suicide deaths 2000-2021. Accessed February 7, 2024. <https://visual-data.dhsoha.state.or.us/t/OHA/views/ORVDRS/Suicide?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y>

<sup>vi</sup> Conner A, Azrael D, Miller M. Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014: A Nationwide Population-Based Study. *Ann Intern Med.* 2019 Dec 17;171(12):885-895. doi: 10.7326/M19-1324.