

Supporting Testimony of Paul Kemp

Thank you, Chairman Tran and the members of the Committee, for holding this important hearing on HB 2538.

My name is Paul Kemp. I've been an Oregon resident since 1985. For the record, that is **[spell your name]**. I am a gun owner and have both handguns and rifles. I am also a founding board member of Gun Owners for Responsible Ownership. However, this is an issue I care deeply about because my family has been deeply affected by a gun tragedy. Over the last 12 years as I've advocated for improving gun safety laws here in Oregon, I've heard about several families who have been affected by veteran firearm suicide.

I am here today to ask you to support this effort to increase suicide prevention training for doctors to help reduce our high Veteran suicide rates. At our organization, we know Firearms are a part of life in Oregon, and an important part of military culture. We also all know that we must be doing everything we can to reduce Oregon's Veteran suicide rates, which are 1.5x higher than national rates.

In my role with Gun Owners for Responsible Ownership, I have found it is highly important, and has a huge impact, when we train doctors and frontline health care workers in Oregon on suicide prevention and give them the skills to effectively talk to their patients about firearms.

Over the past 8 years, I have made presentations at pediatrician clinics with doctors and nurses to help doctors gain skills to talk about firearms and worked with them to distribute secure storage devices. This is highly effective, and when we do these trainings, doctors are much more likely to report afterwards being comfortable talking to their patients.

Research shows when doctors screen for suicide and counsel patients in lethal means, it saves lives. A recent study in Washington found that integrating suicide prevention training in primary care resulted in a 25% reduction in suicide rates (Richards et al., 2024).

If we want to save Veteran lives, we need to get serious about training our doctors in suicide prevention and normalizing lethal means counseling.

- Yet, today, estimates show only 20-40% of primary care doctors complete training on suicide prevention in Oregon.
- Further, less than 4 in 10 doctors report they feel comfortable talking to patients about firearm safety.
- We also know from data that firearm suicides are over 90% fatal. Other methods of suicide have much lower fatality rates. It is also rare that those who survive a

suicide attempt will ever attempt suicide again. Their crisis is over, or they have received the help they needed to deal with their crisis in a healthy manner.

- This firearm topic is no different than other healthcare topics physicians talk with their patients about.
- I firmly believe that our country's citizens and government agencies must take very good care of our veterans and their families for their service to the country for however long that service may have been.

Thank you for your time today. I urge you to work to find ways to increase suicide prevention training for doctors that teach doctors to counsel about firearms. Whether this is mandated, offered as optional professional development training, I am not sure - but what I do know is it is highly needed.

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We must do everything we can to reduce our Veteran - as well as our youth and rural - suicide rates.

Thank you.