

Submitter: Jordan Wales  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB697

I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 697, which would prohibit individuals under the age of 21 from possessing firearms, except in narrowly defined circumstances. While the aim of reducing firearm-related harm is valid, SB 697 represents a disproportionate response that undermines constitutional rights, applies broad generalizations about age and responsibility, and neglects both legal precedent and practical realities.

Eighteen- to twenty-year-olds are recognized under both state and federal law as legal adults. At 18, individuals gain the right to vote, serve on juries, marry, sign contracts, and enlist in the military. They are fully subject to the responsibilities and consequences of adult citizenship. To deny these same adults the right to possess a firearm—particularly for lawful purposes such as self-defense or hunting—is not only inconsistent but legally questionable.

The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that the Second Amendment protects an individual's right to keep and bear arms. In *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) and *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen* (2022), the Court emphasized that this right is not limited to a select few or conditioned on subjective assessments of need. SB 697, by categorically barring an entire class of legal adults based on age alone, bypasses individualized due process and raises serious constitutional concerns.

Moreover, the bill fails to target the root causes of gun violence. Most gun crimes committed by individuals under 21 are already illegal under existing law. These crimes are typically carried out by those who acquire firearms through unlawful means. SB 697, then, does little to deter bad actors while placing additional burdens on law-abiding young adults who wish to exercise their rights responsibly.

From a practical standpoint, the legislation is out of touch with life in rural communities and longstanding traditions of firearm use. In many parts of Oregon, hunting and sport shooting are common and often passed down generationally. Young adults in these communities are frequently introduced to firearms early and taught safe handling practices. A blanket restriction on possession fails to recognize this context and risks criminalizing behavior that is culturally normative and otherwise lawful.

Additionally, the bill's limited exceptions—such as military or police service—fail to address the broader issue of equal protection. A right available only to those in

government service is no longer a right—it becomes a privilege. This unequal standard violates both the spirit and the letter of constitutional protections.

Philosophically, rights in a free society should not be denied based on group status alone. If legal adulthood begins at 18, then constitutional rights must apply at 18 as well. Arbitrary age-based restrictions set a dangerous precedent for curtailing other rights based on assumptions, not behavior. Public safety is a critical concern, but it must be pursued in ways that are evidence-based, narrowly tailored, and respectful of individual liberty.

In conclusion, while the intent behind SB 697 may be rooted in concern for public welfare, its execution is flawed. It penalizes responsible young adults, ignores established legal standards, and risks further erosion of constitutional rights. I urge legislators to reject this proposal and instead focus on policies that address violence through enforcement of existing laws, mental health resources, and targeted intervention—without infringing upon the rights of law-abiding citizens.