

Submitter: Diane Peterson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB243

My name is Diane Peterson and I live in Springfield. I support SB 243 because it is a strong package of policies that will keep our schools and communities safer from weapons designed to rapidly injure and kill human beings, and will prevent impulsive use of firearms by youth and people in crisis.

I am a parent of two young children in a public school district which had one of the first deadly school shootings at Thurston High School in 1998. Our community still feels the effects of this tragedy. While school shootings have increased since then, the age of mass shooters has significantly declined. For the decade following the Thurston tragedy, the average age of a mass shooter was 33. The following decade, it declined to 29. Since 2020, the median age has become 21. In ? of the most recent deadliest mass shootings, the shooter was under the age of 21. The AR-15 is the weapon of choice for mass shootings. Oregon law sets the sale of handguns at age 21, and should also do so for AR-15s.

The anxiety from the threat of a school shooting significantly affects our students ability to learn and focus in the classroom. During the 2023-24 school year, the Safe Oregon tip line received 3,309 tips, which included 208 threats of a school attack and 68 reports of possession of a weapon. In 2023, at least 48 students were disciplined for bringing a handgun, shotgun or rifle to campus. With this data, it is not surprising that 1/2 of students report worrying about a school shooting each week, and many Oregon students report significant mental health challenges. The mental health of parents and caregivers is also impacted. My kindergartner recently described how the teacher needs to tilt the chair in a certain way to get it to fit under the door handle "if a bad guy is in the hallway". She is not yet aware of the full implications of this scenario, but I am, and it troubles me greatly.

I'd like to close by sharing with you the peace pledge that was written by students at Centennial Elementary School in Springfield in response to the shooting at Thurston High School. This pledge has been recited by Centennial students every week for the last 27 years. It goes:

"To honor those students who have lost their lives to school violence, the students of Centennial School pledge to be violence free. We will not be verbally or physically mean to others. We will respect everybody and their abilities. We will show respect by using kindness."

This is an oath to live by, from the mouths of our innocent children. Senators, please

consider your oath to the Oregon constitution, that our government is instituted for the “peace, safety, and happiness” of the people. Please protect our children and our communities from gun tragedies by passing SB 243. Thank you.