

ALLIANCE FOR A
SAFE OREGON.
ACTION

March 27, 2025

To: Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Senate Judiciary Committee Members

From: Jess Marks
Executive Director
Alliance for a Safe Oregon Action

Re: Support for SB243

For the record, my name is Jess Marks, I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for a Safe Oregon. Thank you for having me. I am here today to talk about how the firearm industry, including the types of firearms being sold in the United States, and the technology and lethality of those firearms, has changed significantly over the past 30 years, yet our gun laws have not kept up with this changing technology, leaving our communities vulnerable to preventable gun tragedies.

If we look at data from the US Dept of Justice and from the NRA prior to 1995 on firearm ownership in the United States, the data shows that similar to today, about ½ of Oregonians owned firearms. Of those firearms, 50.5% were hunting rifles or other non-semi-automatic long guns, and about 35% were handguns. Prior to 1995, 85.9% of all handguns owned in the US had magazine capacities of less than 9 rounds.

In 1990, the firearm industry began to dramatically shift the type and technology of firearms it was producing. In particular, it focused on one new style of firearms, sometimes called assault rifles, which is a term that translates from the original German, Sturmgewehr. These rifles were initially developed for military use during WWII to meet the needs of combat soldiers. The technology of this style of weapons vastly improved the ability of soldiers to shoot longer ranges, to carry more ammunition, to shoot more rapid fire at higher speed with less kickback, and to shoot much more accurately with significantly less training.

In the 1990s, the gun industry began to build and market very similar technology in semi-automatic rifles, the most common example probably being the AR-15. From 1990, these military style rifles went from being less than 1% (around 43,000) of all

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firearms manufactured and sold in the US to today, about 25% of all firearm sales. The NRA estimates there are more than 24 million military style semi-automatic rifles in circulation since 1990.

As technology advanced for AR style rifles, it also has for handguns and other types of firearms such as modern sporting pistols. In short, in the 30 year time period from the 1990s to today, the technological advancement of the type of firearms owned here in Oregon changed dramatically such that when shootings happen, significantly more individuals are wounded, and the types and severity of the injuries are much worse. Military-style weapons, like AR-15 variants, typically have up to three to four times the muzzle velocity of typical handgun rounds. This means that a 5.56 round from a military-style semi-automatic rifle has more wounding potential to the human body than a round from a typical 9mm handgun – a fact that any trauma surgeon will attest to.

What is perhaps most notable about any of this is that during that same time period, while there has been this huge shift in the technology and the types of firearms available, there have been almost no changes in how this new technology is regulated. Aside from the federal assault weapons ban, which expired 21 years ago, as firearm technology has rapidly advanced since the 1990s, there has been only one new Federal law passed - the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act in 2023 which primarily expanded background checks.

Instead, we've had incredibly lax laws, operating as if we are still in a country where the primary firearm is a Winchester hunting rifle, while allowing, today in Oregon, an 18-year-old with zero training to walk into a gun dealer, and an hour later, walk out with an AR-15 - a weapon nearly identical to that which United States Marine recruits must spend 2 weeks dry-firing before being allowed to fire a weapon with a live round. Many Veterans question why civilians are allowed to purchase firearms that are more advanced than what many of them went into combat with, with zero training.

The reality is we missed the chance as firearm technology vastly changed in the late 1990s and early 2000s - before school and mass shootings became the norm - to create responsible policies that could have prevented much of the tragedy and trauma our nation faces today. But we can do it now. It's high past time to act and finally pass a meaningful set of policies that match the technology of our time and that protect the lives of Oregonians.