

Submitter:

Gregory McGill

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Judiciary

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB698

I am writing to strongly oppose SB 698, which authorizes governing bodies of certain public entities to adopt policies, ordinances, or regulations limiting the affirmative defense for concealed handgun licensees charged with possessing a firearm in a public building. This bill undermines the rights of law-abiding Oregonians, erodes consistency in state law, and jeopardizes personal safety without clear justification.

First, this legislation infringes on the Second Amendment rights of concealed handgun licensees (CHLs). Oregon's concealed carry laws, including the affirmative defense under ORS 166.370, provide a balanced framework that respects the right to bear arms while allowing reasonable restrictions in sensitive areas. By empowering local entities to chip away at this defense, the bill effectively punishes individuals who have undergone background checks, training, and vetting to exercise their constitutional rights responsibly. This is not a loophole to close—it's a safeguard for law-abiding citizens.

Second, the bill threatens the fundamental right to self-defense. Public buildings—whether courthouses, libraries, or community centers—are not immune to violence, as tragic incidents nationwide have shown. CHLs are trained to carry responsibly, often as a last line of defense for themselves and others. Stripping away their affirmative defense in these spaces leaves them vulnerable to prosecution for exercising a right that could save lives, all while doing little to deter criminals who ignore laws anyway. Where is the evidence that this change will enhance safety rather than simply disarm the law-abiding?

Finally, this proposal invites a patchwork of inconsistent regulations across Oregon. If every county, city, or public entity can set its own rules, CHLs will face a confusing maze of policies—legal in one building, criminalized in the next. This undermines the uniformity of state law, creating traps for well-meaning citizens and overburdening courts with unnecessary litigation. Oregonians deserve clarity and fairness, not a fragmented system that punishes compliance.

I urge the Committee to reject SB 698 and protect the rights of concealed handgun licensees who follow the law. If public safety is the goal, focus on enforcing existing laws against actual threats, not disarming those who pose none. Thank you for your time and consideration.