

Submitter:

Kim Evans

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Judiciary

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB698

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 698 (SB 698) in the 2025 Oregon legislative session. This bill, which authorizes governing bodies of public entities to limit the affirmative defense for concealed handgun licensees carrying firearms in public buildings, undermines the rights of law-abiding Oregonians, creates unnecessary confusion, and fails to address the root causes of public safety concerns.

First, SB 698 erodes the fundamental rights of individuals who have undergone rigorous background checks and training to obtain a concealed handgun license (CHL). Oregon's CHL holders are among the most vetted and responsible citizens, with data consistently showing they commit crimes at rates far lower than the general population. By stripping away their affirmative defense, this bill punishes law-abiding individuals for exercising their Second Amendment rights and their state-protected ability to defend themselves. Public buildings, such as libraries or community centers, are not inherently more dangerous because a licensed individual carries a firearm responsibly—rather, these citizens often enhance public safety by being prepared to respond to threats.

Second, this bill introduces a patchwork of inconsistent regulations across Oregon. Allowing individual governing bodies to set their own policies creates a confusing and unpredictable landscape for CHL holders. What may be permissible in one county could become a criminal act in another, despite the individual following the same state-issued license requirements. This lack of uniformity not only complicates compliance for citizens but also places an undue burden on law enforcement to interpret and enforce varying local rules. Oregonians deserve clarity and consistency in the law, not a fragmented system that invites unintentional violations.

Finally, SB 698 fails to address the real issues surrounding public safety. If the goal is to reduce firearm-related incidents, the focus should be on enforcing existing laws, targeting illegal firearm possession, and addressing mental health challenges—none of which are impacted by restricting the rights of licensed concealed carriers. Evidence from states with permissive concealed carry laws shows no correlation between lawful carry and increased crime; in fact, many argue it serves as a deterrent. This bill distracts from meaningful solutions and instead scapegoats a group that has already demonstrated its commitment to following the law.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 698 is an ill-conceived measure that infringes on individual rights, sows confusion, and diverts attention from effective public safety strategies. I

urge the Oregon Legislature to reject this bill and instead pursue policies that respect the rights of law-abiding citizens while addressing genuine threats to our communities. Oregonians deserve better than this.