



Testimony in Support of HB 2510  
House Committee on Health Care  
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## Doernbecher Children's Hospital

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Dear Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Hayden and Salinas, and members of the committee,

My name is Kate Ballard, and I am a registered nurse at Doernbecher Children's Hospital. One of my unit's primary populations is pediatric patients recovering from suicide attempts. I also care for patients with traumatic injuries and complex medical needs. I write to you in strong support of HB 2510.

One in five U.S. households with children contains an unsecured, loaded gun, providing easy access and increasing the risk of youth suicide, unintentional shootings and gun violence.<sup>1</sup> In gun owning homes, 36% of children under age 10 reported that they had handled the firearms, many without their parents' knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This statistic has been confirmed in my personal experience as a pediatric nurse. In a recent interview with a patient, she described how a family friend kept a loaded gun under a blanket next to their couch. She and her younger sibling took turns holding it when adults were not around.

In 2018 alone, 40 Oregon children and adolescents died by firearm: 28 suicides, eight homicides, two accidental deaths and two undetermined manners of death.<sup>3,4</sup> Suicide is the leading cause of death among Oregonians 10 to 24 years old, with guns being the most common mechanism.<sup>5,6</sup> In fact, Oregon has the fastest-growing rate of pediatric suicide by firearm in the country.<sup>7,8</sup>

The effects of firearm injuries are often lifelong and life-altering. The resilience of these patients continually inspires me, but I wish they did not have to summon such courage as a child, especially at the hands of something so preventable.

To address this crisis, many organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend the enactment of safe storage laws, such as HB 2510.<sup>9,10,11</sup> Numerous studies indicate that these laws increase safe storage practices and decrease both pediatric suicide rates and accidental firearm deaths.<sup>12,13,14,15,16</sup> Currently, 29 states and the District of Columbia have child access prevention (CAP) laws in place.<sup>17</sup> Oregon, however, does not have any statutes governing firearm storage.<sup>18,19</sup>

As you consider HB 2510, I urge your caution in allowing fatalism to influence the debate. It is a common fallacy that someone who is suicidal will inevitably kill themselves, even if they cannot access a gun. The data simply does not support this argument. My own experience includes a patient who was in a crisis and trying to end her life by frantically attempting to access the gun inside her parent's safe. Unsuccessful, she instead took a handful of pills. The most common alternative, drug overdose, is fatal in 2% of cases, while firearms are fatal in 90% of cases.<sup>20</sup> That gun safe preventing her access to a firearm is the reason she is still alive today without permanent physical harm. This is but one example of how safely storing weapons can prevent youth suicide, as well as accidental or homicidal firearm death.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### 1. **HB 2510 is constitutional.**

The National Rifle Association sued San Francisco in federal court to overturn a more restrictive safe storage law on Second Amendment grounds.<sup>21,22</sup> The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the law, differentiating it from the Supreme Court case *District of Columbia v. Heller*, because it does not prohibit someone from carrying a loaded handgun while in their home.<sup>23,24</sup> The Court also held that a safely stored gun can be obtained or enabled within a matter of seconds, which the Court determined does not place an unacceptable burden on gun owners' Second Amendment rights.<sup>25,26</sup>

### 2. **Death is not inevitable for someone with suicidal ideations, and reducing their access to firearms substantially increases their likelihood of survival.**

A common falsehood is that someone with suicidal ideations will inevitably kill themselves, even if they cannot get access to a firearm. However, most people who attempt suicide without a gun survive and go on to live out their lives.<sup>27</sup> Drug overdoses, the most common alternative, are fatal in only 2% of cases, while firearms are fatal in 90% of cases.<sup>28</sup> In the long term, 9/10 survivors do not go on to die by suicide later, "but those who reach for a gun rarely [get this] second chance."<sup>29</sup>

### 3. **Safe storage does not hinder self-defense.**

A common myth is that safe storage would encumber the owner from using the firearm in self-defense. As affirmed by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, safely stored guns can be accessed by owners within seconds, providing no hinderance to acts of self-defense.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, unsecured guns pose a greater threat to safety. In 2018 alone, 40 Oregon children died by firearm.<sup>31</sup> In addition, unsecured guns, which are vulnerable to theft, may actually raise the likelihood of crime and violence. During a 4-year period in Oregon, an estimated 17,302 guns were reported stolen from private gun owners.<sup>32</sup> This may be an undercount, as Oregon does not currently require firearm owners to report gun theft or loss.<sup>33</sup> HB 2510 will help prevent theft, injury and death in the first place, and will require owners to report loss or theft, should it occur.

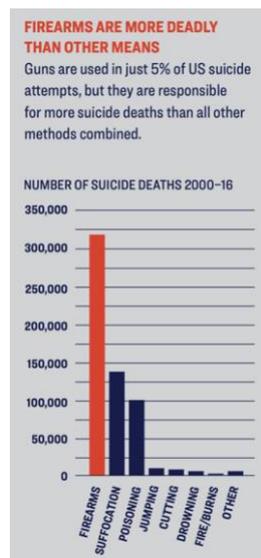
### 4. **Safe storage laws, like HB 2510, work.**

Numerous studies demonstrate that safe storage laws are effective in increasing safe storage practices and reducing firearm injury and death.<sup>34,35,36,37,38</sup> A 1997 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* found that, after the implementation of safe storage laws, accidental shooting deaths among children were reduced by 23%.<sup>39</sup> A 2019 article in *JAMA Pediatrics* found that 1/3 of youth suicides and accidental deaths by firearm could be prevented by safe storage laws.<sup>40</sup> A 2018 study found that strong safe storage laws, like HB 2510, were associated with a 54% reduction in self-inflicted firearm injuries and a 44% decrease in accidental injuries.<sup>41</sup>

Based on overwhelming evidence, many organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, World Health Organization and American Bar Association, support the enactment of safe storage laws.<sup>42,43,44</sup> Currently, Oregon is among the minority of states that do not have any safe storage laws.<sup>45,46</sup>

Owning a firearm is a great responsibility. HB 2510 simply ensures that gun owners store these items, which can be used as dangerous weapons, in a safe manner. Our message is "neither anti-gun nor pro-gun. It is pro-data."<sup>47</sup> I urge you to vote yes on HB 2510. Thank you for your consideration. I am willing to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,  
Kate Ballard, BSN, RN



Giffords Law Center

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