



From the Sheriff's Desk

Archives 2015

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March 31, 2015

As a longtime supporter of the individual citizen's right to keep and bear arms and someone who is sworn to uphold the Constitutional protections thereof, I have decided to voice my opposition to Oregon Senate Bill (SB) 941, which is the current background check bill under consideration in Salem.

The bill is not without its merits in some respects: The idea that we should have a mechanism in place to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people is not new, and common sense tells us that the government has a responsibility to do what it can to protect society from those who should not have a gun in their hands. Unfortunately, in my view, SB 941 as it currently stands is not that bill.

Oregon sheriffs have been working with legislators to address the numerous deleterious effects this bill poses for the rights of Oregonians, however, serious concerns remain, which make the current status of the bill unpalatable, from my point of view.

First, the law has the potential for turning many law abiding citizens into law-breakers—without just cause. Many Oregonians are firearm owners who are responsible with their guns and cautious with whom they buy, sell or trade their firearms. Adding more requirements to these responsible gun owners does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, but creates additional burdens for people merely desiring to exercise their rights.

Second, the law is unenforceable. No one in Salem has a plan or the resources for law enforcement to enforce those gun transfers that occur outside the restrictions of this proposed law. There is some sentiment in Salem that seems to indicate that—whether it is enforceable or not—it makes a statement for the desire to control access to firearms for unauthorized people. But unenforceable laws have a damaging effect: they diminish the respect for the law, and put law enforcement officers in a negative light with an ever-increasing number of people. Law enforcement needs the majority of good, decent, law-abiding citizens on our side. This has potential for doing the opposite.

Finally, I am opposed to SB 941, because it does nothing to fix concerns with our current background check system. Oregon's background check system is overburdened already, causing unreasonable delays for lawful individuals who should not have to wait sometimes weeks and months to be cleared to buy a firearm. Adding additional layers to the process portends to make matters worse.



The Oregon State Sheriff's Association will offer written testimony on SB 941 when the bill get's a hearing tomorrow, Wednesday, April 1. You can visit www.oregonsheriffs.org afterward to review that testimony. I encourage you, if you have strong concerns about this bill to contact your state senator and make your views known. I do understand that good citizens can disagree about the concerns I have expressed in this open letter to you. As your elected sheriff, I believe it is my duty to let all citizens know where I stand on this and other critical Constitutional issues.