

Let's end the lethal loophole in Oregon's gun laws

It happened again. Another case of domestic violence resulting in a murder. Just this week in San Bernadino, Calif., a man walked into his wife's place of work – an elementary school – and shot to death her, a student and himself. Another student was injured. He was her husband, he was her abuser, and he had a gun.

Statistics compiled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and various

organizations show the pattern: A gun in the home where there is domestic violence increases the risk of homicide manyfold: by one academic study, abused women are five times more likely to be killed by their abuser if their abuser owns a firearm.

There are laws that prevent criminals from owning guns, but there are also laws that allow convicted stalkers and abusers to legally possess a gun right up until they kill. It's unconscionable.

Oregon Senate Bill 797 attempts to close that gap.

Currently, Oregon statute makes it unlawful for someone to possess a firearm if they are menacing – stalking, intimidating etc., – someone they have a legal relationship with, which means being married to, having a child together or having cohabitated. SB 797 expands that to protect people of domestic violence even if they have not had that specific definition of relationship. It's dubbed the Boyfriend Loophole. And SB 797 would make it unlawful for a person who has been convicted of stalking to own a gun.

It's about time. Because we as a society shouldn't

sanction lethal force to people who view human beings as prey.

The gun lobby, fronted here by the Oregon Firearms Federation, is taking the predictable stance in opposing any legislation that regulates ownership, and multiple copies of a form letter calling for this and other bills' defeat was presented to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

In sharp contrast to that impersonal, copied-and-pasted statement penned by the Federation, is the very personal, pervasive tragedy of domestic violence and its proven link to public violence and murder, notably among women seeking to escape abusive relationships.

In addition to SB 797, we strongly urge the Oregon Senate to approve a House-passed measure that would include the influence of domestic violence and abuse when deciding sentences for people convicted of a crime.

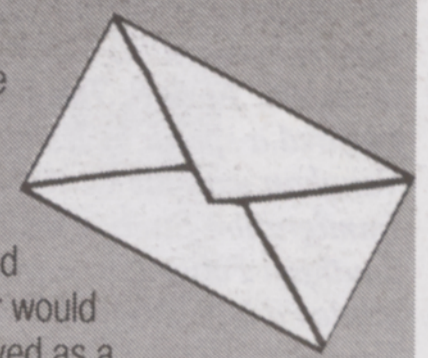
Numerous statistics show that the majority of women who are or have been in prison attribute their incarceration to their relationship with an abuser.

There's no question that gun laws are an imperfect tool, and criminals will always attempt to thwart laws. It's as old as the hills. But let's do all we can to ensure that the men and women seeking to buy guns are at least better than the people who beat and traumatize those they claim to love. It's time to acknowledge that domestic violence is among the most pervasive forms of terrorism in our community, and we must do all we can to prevent those responsible from being armed.

EDITORIAL

Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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We can get ahead of the curve on homelessness

Young people grow up understanding that having people experiencing homelessness in their city is simply a fact of life. It's a sad reality. The truth is mass homelessness hasn't always existed in American cities.

Saying that, it exists today and has become a normal part of life for many people living and working in American cities. Portland is no different. People are frustrated.

Compassion fatigue is real.

People believe homelessness can't be solved. They've given up on the idea that government can do anything to stop people from sleeping on our streets.

What gives?

Trying to convince people that we are being successful at housing people is a never-ending saga. It's

true that we have collectively been able to accomplish great things given our circumstances. Sadly, it still doesn't change the fact that there's a hole in the bucket.

Given the fact that we're facing massive state and federal budget cuts – many nonprofits and others are preparing for the storm of our lives. We understand the clear reality that if many of the programs that were already underfunded on the homeless and housing front are completely stripped back we will be facing unprecedented homelessness.

Some would argue that we're on the verge of facing a new era of increased enforcement of homeless camps and new investments in massive shelters – in many ways reverting back to a place in the 1980s when the only answer to modern-day homelessness was just that – the criminal justice system and more shelter beds.

It led to an era where instead of investing in housing stock for low-income people we started to build an entire system of homeless services that worked not to solve the housing crisis, but instead to simply manage the problem.

What to do?

Local communities have always grappled with how to plan long-term while also navigating the complexities of having thousands of people living on our streets. There's no question that we need to maintain and increase our investments in affordable housing. In the meantime, if I could wave a magic wand, this is what I think could be done to help bridge the gap between our homeless neighbors and the larger public:

First, we must start investing in more programs that

create income for people on the streets – especially programs that show real results helping solve the problems that exist. I'm referring a trash pick-up service for people on the streets.

It's my opinion that people don't see homeless people as the problem. They see trash as the problem. An investment to provide outreach and trash pick-up would generate enormous amount of goodwill, help clean up our natural areas and give people on the streets income. It's not rocket science.

Secondly, we need to continue to give organizations like the Village Coalition, who are working with homeless camps, the resources they need to be successful.

We more or less starve groups trying to actually organize homeless camps. Turf wars between nonprofits, personalities and larger political agendas get in the way of actually just doing what's right. There doesn't need to be a whole lot of bureaucracy in creating a handfull of positions for people to help work with people on the streets to maintain safe camps. Again, we're not talking rocket science.

Lastly, working with government and the private sector we must find a way to create more income opportunities for people. We live in a world of sharing economies, a tech-boom and a city that is working to build a green infrastructure for decades to come. There has to be a way to capture these intersections and give people the opportunity to contribute to making Portland the city that works for everyone.

The reality is homelessness on the street is going to get worse before it's going to get better, especially under this current White House administration. If we aren't getting ahead of the curve and offering as many harm-reduction approaches as possible, it's going to continue to drive a wedge into helping people get off the streets and maintaining political will to end people's homelessness.

I loathe the idea of ever fighting over 12-foot square slab of concrete, increased law enforcement strategies and creating more shelter beds because we feel like there's no other options. It's a strategy that isn't any more sophisticated than the approaches used in centuries past. Yes, centuries.

We can continue to build toward the resources needed to both give people on the streets the best tools available given their circumstances and continuing to chip away at creating more affordable housing. It's now or never. The storm is lurking on the horizon and will hit us soon enough.



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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