

Thank you Chairman Langley, members of the joint committee on Education & Culture for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to LD 1761 Act Regarding the Prohibition on the Possession of a Firearm on School Property. I am unable to appear in person because I work for Portland Public Schools and unable to take the day off.

I was appalled to learn Troy Jackson, Bill Diamond, John Martin and James Dill introduced a bill to allow guns in K-12 school parking lots to this Committee. Last year a similar bill was introduced and it was defeated. I've thought about the dangerous impact it may have on our students and staff in our schools from my perspective as someone who has worked in the Maine public school system for over 30 years now. Guns and schools don't mix period. We don't need guns on school property - even in the parking lots.

There have been 3 school shootings in the last 2 days in our country, two you might have read about, the third was back page news: on Monday afternoon, someone opened fired from a pickup truck outside a New Orleans school. A 14-year-old boy who was among a group of students in the school parking lot at the time was wounded. Here in Maine we tend to feel we're safe from gun violence. However, in the first 3 weeks of 2018 4 people have been murdered with a gun and 1 suicide by gun just last week (that's been reported). Let's not forget about Maine's domestic violence problem ~ over half of Maine's gun murders are domestic violence (which includes children). We simply cannot afford to weaken our extremely weak gun laws.

My beautiful daughter, Darien, was killed by gun violence right here in Maine. Darien was shot in her own home while sleeping in Portland, Maine in 2010. Her world was violently turned upside down and she endured great physical and emotional pain trying to recover but died on February 28, 2010. Darien never having the opportunity to reach her full potential. Darien was born, raised and educated right here in Maine. After graduating from Bowdoin College she made her home in Maine working first at Waynelete School, PPS and was ultimately employed at Aetna Insurance at the time of her shooting. Darien had an infectious smile, love for all and a zest for life. She had her whole life ahead of her. In fact, her goal was to become an elementary teacher. My daughter's death devastated me.

Darien's homicide has never been solved, in part because we have weak gun laws in Maine. The gun used to kill her was later found at the scene of another (unrelated) The police learned that it was sold privately, without a background check, no records kept and the seller "can't remember" who or even when he sold it in Maine - completely legal here in Maine, by the way. I have dedicated myself to helping victims of violence, especially gun violence and preventing others from the pain and suffering our daughter endured and I have felt since my daughter's death. The best thing we can do is to prevent people from becoming victims in the first place ~ gun violence is preventable. Today, that means asking you all to vote against a bill that would put young lives at risk.

Currently, no one is allowed guns in schools, except law enforcement. It's the one bright line we maintain in Maine. Allowing guns in parking lots is just a slippery slope to get them into

schools. Our schools should be one the safest places in our communities. We should be strengthening our gun laws not weakening them. This is bill is unnecessary and unsafe. This is a NRA tactic to weaken gun laws and they are doing this across the country.

As legislators, you have the responsibility to take steps to make Maine citizens safer. This bill would make us less safe. I say this to you as citizen who understands responsible gun ownership and who respects the Second Amendment. My husband is a life- long hunter and we own guns, but we also recognize the huge responsibility that comes with owning a firearm.

Maine's principals, teachers, superintendents, and school board members believe that we should not weaken the prohibition on guns on school grounds and we must maintain that bright line to prevent future encroachment. In fact, this is what the School Board and Superintendents Associations testified last year when this same bill was defeated. We urge you to stand up to the out of state gun lobby trying to put guns in our K-12 schools for the second year in a row. Why are we wasting precious tax payers' money and time on this again? The bottom line is that this bill will not make schools safer-it will endanger them. Please vote ought not to pass on LD 1761

Thank you,

Judi Richardson

[www.rememberingdarien.org](http://www.rememberingdarien.org)