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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 1761

AN ACT REGARDING THE PROHIBITION ON THE POSSESSION OF A FIREARM ON SCHOOL PROPERTY

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director for Maine School Management Association, and am here on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 1761.

We have many responsibilities as school leaders that range from educating all children who walk through our doors to making sure we have the best teachers possible in front of the classroom. But the one duty that rises above all others is keeping our children safe.

That responsibility requires us to do whatever we can to create a safe haven for children on school grounds. And while we know that 100 percent safety is impossible to achieve, we are obligated to strive for that goal.

Because of that responsibility we have consistently supported banning guns on schools grounds with some very specific exceptions.

Those exceptions include guns carried by law enforcement officers; a person using the rare school-operated gun range; a person with an unloaded firearm in a school sanctioned educational program; and, a person who possesses an unloaded firearm that is stored inside a locked vehicle in a closed container, a zipped case or a locked firearms rack while the person is attending a hunter's breakfast, which takes place outside of regular school hours and is authorized by the school board (20-A, §6552).

This prohibition has survived other gun law changes in Maine, the most substantive being the concealed carry law passed in 2015.

L.D. 1761 is the second bill being considered by the 128th Legislature that would allow guns on school grounds. The first, L.D. 988 was indefinitely postponed last year.

This bill differs from last year's legislation because it now says the gun has to be unloaded and in a locked container or rack. Last year's bill would have allowed the gun to be in the possession of a person in a motor vehicle. Both say the person with the gun has to be dropping off or picking up a student and stay in the car.

Both completely miss the point of our opposition. We believe that to protect students from unintended or intended harm there has to be a bright line. No guns on school property. Period.

Why?

Because the bright line is our first line of defense.

We don't expect most people to come onto school property with their hunting rifle in the car with the intention of hurting anyone. And, while we understand a school shooting, whether intentional or accidental, still has a low probability, a child could still end up severely injured or dead.

We don't have the staff or the time in the morning to make sure people driving onto school grounds have their gun rack or case locked. We know that parents who don't expect to get out of a car when dropping off their child won't think twice about stepping out if their child forgets something or needs their help. If the gun is on school property, the probability increases that an accident can happen.

Some of our own members are nostalgic for the times when a hunter could have a rifle in their gun rack and go anywhere without notice. We understand that nostalgia, but times have changed. What was once unimaginable already has occurred.

There is no obvious solution to senseless violence or accidental shootings, but we are committed to keeping schools as safe as they possibly can be. We have spent considerable resources on securing our buildings and requiring front-desk check-ins. We have lock-down drills and provide staff training to help them know how to respond when visitors are escalating out of control. And, we have the bright line on guns.

We are asking this committee to maintain that line for the sake of our children.