

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Cam Shannon. I live in Yarmouth. I am the president of the board of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition and I'm here today in support of LDs 2224 and 2238.

LD 2224 would mandate background checks for the sale of any guns between strangers. It would also encourage, but not require, background checks among family members. This is a good bill that will prevent firearms from getting into the hands of those who are prohibited from having them.

LD 2224 would also make slight modifications to Maine's Yellow Flag law, which has helped over 150 people in Maine since 2019. Currently, the yellow flag law allows police officers to take someone into custody and have them evaluated by a medical professional. Once the provider has made a mental health diagnosis, a judge can decide to temporarily remove the person's firearms. This means of removing firearms from someone in crisis is a dangerous and costly – both in time and money – process that only applies to people with mental illness.

Today the Maine Gun Safety Coalition is asking for the creation of an entirely new pathway: a true extreme risk protection order that has three key components. First, we need to give families the power to petition a judge directly to temporarily remove firearms without involving the police. Family members know their loved one best. Family members are best able to recognize warning signs. Unfortunately, under current law, Maine families can only recognize the potential for disaster. In many cases, they have no power to stop it.

Second, we need to bypass the medical evaluation and go straight to a judge. Medical evaluations are costly in terms of time and money. What's more, they are only warranted in the case of mental illness. Requiring a medical evaluation and mental health diagnosis, disregards everyday Mainers who are in temporary crisis, not mentally ill, but still very much at risk of hurting themselves or others.

Third, we need to avoid requiring that someone be taken into police custody to initiate the process. Taking an armed person in crisis into custody is a recipe for disaster. It risks the lives of police officers, the person in crisis, and anyone in the vicinity.

LD 2238 would create a 72-hour waiting period between the purchase and receipt of a firearm. This is an important way to prevent both suicide and homicide. This is a very important public health bill in our state given Maine's high suicide rate and the lethality of firearms.

Thank you for your time and service.