

Thank you Senator Beebe, Representative Salisbury and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee members for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of L.D. 405 “An Act to Prevent False Reporting Leading to Evacuation, Shutdown or Lockdown” I am Judi Richardson of South Portland, Maine and have been employed in the Maine public school system for over 30 years. I am also the mother of a beautiful daughter, Darien, whose life was taken in act of gun violence during a home invasion in Portland, Maine. I am currently an Ed Tech/BHP at Portland Public Schools and unable to attend today.

On November 15, 2022 I was at my usual morning position supporting students with special needs at the PATHS program including students whose home school is Portland High. Around 9 am several of our students became upset stating there were messages on social media about an “active shooter” at Portland High. Parents started calling/texting their children, the parents’ concerns were heightened as false information spread on social media. Rumors quickly circulated that up to 5 people had been shot, but staff at PATHS knew nothing at that time. Even parents of the students that didn’t attend Portland High started calling/texting checking on their children.

My first concern was to calm my students down. I spoke with the PATHS teacher privately and told her I was taking the Portland High students to the office to help them feel safe and try and find out some answers. I text my co-workers at Portland High and received confirmation that they were in lockdown and all they knew was police were searching the building with long guns out, very stressful and traumatizing for all. While in the office beginning to explain and make a plan for my students I received a call on my cell at 10:08 am from Portland Public Schools and I answered – it was a “robo” call that stated *“there was an active shooter situation at Portland High School”* ~ That call didn’t say it was a hoax. I could see the fear in my student’s eyes and feel their anxiety to my core. In an attempt to alleviate some of that I found myself uttering words I didn’t truly believe: *“everyone’s safe, no one is hurt, everything’s going to be alright”*. How could I believe everything will be alright when I know first-hand the pain and trauma caused by gun violence. I personally know many people who have experienced school shootings, have been shot and know parents whose daughters and sons have been killed in school shootings, but that I kept to myself, even as I am re-traumatized by this situation I have to protect my students and make them feel safe. Around 11 a.m., Portland High School began dismissing students, some could stay if they needed to but I was told the Portland High students at PATHS weren’t allowed to go back to their high school as the entire area around PHS was still blocked off by the police. So I had my students call their families to be picked up.

As we all know now that situation was a “hoax” but at the time the schools must lockdown, police show up as a full tactical response, and medical facilities prepared for the worse. This “hoax” created an extremely emotional, stressful and traumatic situation for all students, staff, families AND the greater community. But another potentially dangerous consequence of hoaxes like the one on November 15<sup>th</sup> is that people may question the validity of any future “active shooter” situation threats.

LD 405 will help deter false alarms to help protect both the public and public resources. It is vital that we remain vigilant because school shootings are real and they are increasing in number. L.D. 405 will make it a crime to report false alarms to 9-1-1 dispatchers, which is what happened on November 15<sup>th</sup>. As legislators, you have a responsibility to take steps to make Maine citizens safer. Please vote in support of L.D. 405. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

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