

Hillary Shende
Brunswick
LD 168

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Hillary Shende, and I am in favor of LD 168.

I am here to beg that the Maine State Legislature to pass this bill. I am a mother of two school-aged children, and I am sick and tired of being anxious every weekday morning that my children might not come home from school that afternoon. Research by the Rand Corporation shows that universal background check laws reduce violent crimes like the school shootings I am worried about, but you don't need to know that to draw the logical conclusion that allowing anyone, no matter their history, to purchase a weapon of war is not a safe public policy!! We may not have had a mass shooting in Maine yet, but it's only a matter of time before we do, given this glaring lack of protection for the public.

My kids are scared. They know what the ALICE drills are about, even if they are discussed using euphemistic terms. Even my otherwise very level-headed high schooler burst into tears the other day when she learned about what happened in Nashville last week. "How can this be the world we live in?!" she screamed. I couldn't answer because there is no justifiable reason for this to be the case. And the truth is, that unless you're a combat veteran, none of us who graduated high school before Columbine have any idea what it's like to have to go to a building every day, knowing that setting foot inside that building increases your chances of being murdered that day. And we wonder why teens are experiencing so much depression and anxiety in recent years.

Already, guns easily purchased here have been used in mass shootings elsewhere. Not long ago, our reckless policy on background checks allowed a shooter to acquire his guns in Maine, no questions asked, and go kill 22 people in Canada. In fact, it is so common for states with lax gun laws to enable crime in other places that there is a name for it: it's called the Iron Pipeline. Get your guns in a state without universal background checks and take them up and down the I 95 corridor, committing crimes in any city you want, no matter the gun laws there. You got yours legally in a private sale in Maine!

And let's not forget we have plenty of gun violence harming Mainers as well: domestic violence is an enormous problem here, but anyone with a protection order against them can just open up Uncle Henry's, answer an ad, and buy a firearm in a private sale, no questions asked. They may indeed be legally prohibited from possessing that firearm, but they can still easily get their hands on one and kill their partner before a probation officer would have the slightest clue that the gun was even in their possession. What good is a protection order that can't possibly protect its victim?! Without universal background checks, protection orders are utterly worthless. Not even worth the paper they're printed on.

In short, we the public have had enough. Please close this loophole. There is not now, nor will there ever be, a downside to passing this bill that is more important than the literal lives of those it will save. Thank you.