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TO: Joint Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety  
FROM: Dan Morin – Director of Communications and Government Affairs  
DATE: April 3, 2023

**SUPPORT** [LD 60](#) - An Act to Require a 72-hour Waiting Period After the Sale of a Firearm

The Maine Medical Association is a volunteer statewide professional organization of more than 4,300 current and future Maine physicians in all clinical specialties and practice settings. Maine’s physicians are providing comment in support of:

- LD 60, An Act to Require a 72-hour Waiting Period After the Sale of a Firearm
- LD 22, An Act to Impede the Transfer of Firearms to Prohibited Persons
- LD 168, An Act Regarding Criminal Background Checks for the Sale, Transfer or Exchange of Firearms
- LD 582, An Act to Enhance Certain Penalties for Possession of Firearms by Prohibited Persons

[LD 60](#) requires a 72-hour waiting period between an agreement for the purchase and sale of a firearm and its delivery to the purchaser.

Institution of a 72-hour waiting period for all firearm transfers in Maine is a smart, practical idea. The does not eliminate the Second Amendment rights as Americans. This is not preventing somebody from purchasing a gun. This instead provides a crucial “cooling off” period, while also potentially allowing law enforcement additional time to perform accurate background checks.

## Suicides

Research has consistently identified firearm availability as a risk factor for suicide.

[In Maine in 2021](#), there were 178 deaths by firearms. Of these deaths, 2 were unintentional, 17 were homicides, 158 were suicides. Suicide rates increased 30% between 2000–2018 and declined in 2019 and 2020. Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States, with 45,979 deaths in 2020. This is about one death every 11 minutes. Americans with higher-than-average rates of suicide are veterans, people who live in rural areas.

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Suicide attempts are often impulsive acts, driven by transient life crises, with minimal, if any, planning. Studies suggest most suicide survivors only briefly contemplated their actions before an attempt. Addressing that impulsivity, which a 72-hour waiting period for firearm transfers would help do, would literally save lives.

A [New England Journal of Medicine](#) study of firearm ownership and mortality in a cohort of 26.3 million adult residents of California, we found an elevated risk of suicide among a large sample of first-time handgun owners. This risk was driven by a much higher rate of suicide by firearm — not by higher rates of suicide by other methods.

### **Waiting Periods Work**

In 2015, Wisconsin repealed its 48-hour handgun purchase waiting period. As a result, handgun purchases from licensed firearm dealers could proceed without delay following a cleared background check. The waiting period repeal in Wisconsin was associated with increases in both handgun and firearm suicides. The findings suggest that waiting periods may be effective means restriction policies to reduce suicide. Post repeal suicides were [more likely to involve handguns](#) than those in the 5 years immediately preceding the repeal.

The Brady Handgun Violence Protection Act was passed by Congress in 1994. It imposed a five-day waiting period for handguns purchased from licensed dealers. In the four years between the time the law was passed and when it was eliminated in 1998, there was a 17% drop-off in gun homicides and a 6% reduction in gun suicides across the country.

**LD 22** prohibits the sale or transfer of a firearm to a person who is prohibited from owning a firearm, possessing a firearm or having a firearm under that person's control.

Particularly compelling to our physician members were data from the Deadly Force Review Panel which outlined various demographic and social characteristics contributing to use of deadly force in Maine, including:

- 80 % had criminal histories,
- 100 % had weapons in hand,
- 84 % were known by family, friends, or neighbors to be violent,
- 50 % were living in isolated rural areas of Maine,
- 47 % involved domestic violence, with domestic partners present for at least part of the incidents,
- 32 % expressed suicidal intent, and
- 26 % were legally prohibited from possessing firearms.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the committee with our comments and suggestions.

### **Resources:**

American College of Emergency Physicians: [Firearm Safety and Injury Prevention](#)

American College of Surgeons: [Statement on Firearm Injuries](#)

American Academy of Family Physicians: [Gun Violence, Prevention of \(Position Paper\)](#)

American Academy of Pediatrics: [Firearm-Related Injuries and Deaths in Children and Youth:](#)

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## Injury Prevention and Harm Reduction

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