



Testimony of Stephanie Eglinton
Executive Director, Maine Children's Alliance

In support of An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services and
Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources
LD 2237
March 4, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Stephanie Eglinton. I am executive director of the Maine Children's Alliance. We are a statewide, non-partisan organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies and promote best practices to improve the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families.

On behalf of MCA, I offer testimony in support of LD 2237. Children and youth need safe, supportive environments for healthy growth and development, which establishes the foundation for future health and well-being. When children and youth grow up in homes and communities where they are exposed to violence, their health and well-being is negatively impacted, and this can have effects over their lifespans.

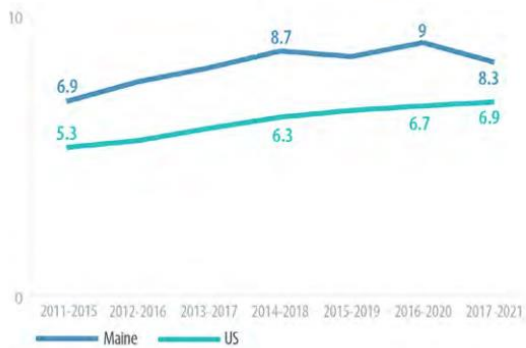
Given the impact of the events in Lewiston in October, we strongly urge this committee and the Legislature to take meaningful action to establish commonsense gun safety policies that will ensure firearms are not in the hands of those who pose a risk to themselves or others. Our impact will be limited, however, if we do not also take a comprehensive, public health approach to addressing home and community violence and its root causes.

To prevent tragedies, it is essential that individuals experiencing a crisis are able to get the help they need, when they need it. According to the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 89% of firearm fatalities in 2021 were suicides, a rate significantly higher than the national average.¹ As depicted in the MCA KIDS COUNT Data Book 2023 graph below, Maine's teen suicide rate remains concerning, and is above the national average. Similarly concerning are the numbers of youth visiting the emergency room for suicidal ideation or suicide attempts, with notable increases between 2020 and 2021 (below, right). It is critical to ensure that youth and adults experiencing mental health crises get the timely and appropriate treatment and support they need.

[over]

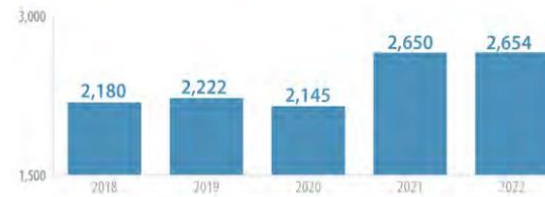
¹ Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Maine DHHS. Feb 2023. Report pursuant to 22 MRS, Ch. 256-A §1425

Maine's teen suicide rate has remained above the national rate
 Five-year average suicide rate per year per 100,000 youth, ages 10-19,
 Maine compared to the U.S.



Source: National data: [CDC WONDER Online Database](#), and Maine data: [Child and Teen Suicide in Maine](#), KIDS COUNT

In Maine, visits to the emergency room for suicidal ideation or suicide attempts increased by over 500 in 2021 and did not decrease in 2022
 Annual number of visits to any emergency room in Maine by youth ages 19 and under for suicidal ideation or attempt



Source: [Maine Emergency Room Visits Involving Suicidal Intent](#), Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Maine Suicide Prevention Program's syndromic dashboard.

This legislation provides a critical opportunity to do just that, by investing in community-based supports and services for children, youth, and their families, when they are experiencing challenges or are in crisis – through the establishment of a network of crisis receiving centers and investments to reduce waitlists for critical behavioral health services. It also importantly establishes a new Office of Violence Prevention in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is critical to facilitating the collection of data and information and resource sharing with community partners, in our current and future efforts to prevent violence in our state.

We urge the committee to act now to support this important legislation to establish a public health response to comprehensively address and prevent violence in communities across our state. Maine children, youth, and their families are counting on us to take action to protect their health, safety, and well-being.

Thank you for your consideration.