

March 5, 2024

Dear Chairs Senator Carney and Representative Moonen and the Respected Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

I stand before you today not just as a citizen but as a living testament to the struggles and triumphs faced by those living with mental health disorders to testify in favor of LD 2119, An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm Rights.

My journey through the valleys of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation for the majority of my life has taught me invaluable lessons about resilience, the importance of proactive mental health management, and the critical role of preventive measures in safeguarding against the darkest moments that afflict so many of us in silence. LD 2119 provides a voluntary, dignified avenue for individuals like myself to preemptively distance ourselves from the means that statistically pose the greatest risk during moments of crisis¹. This bill acknowledges the complex interplay between mental health and access to lethal means², offering a practical solution that respects individual autonomy while promoting community safety. It is crucial to allow individuals in moments of clarity to enact safeguards that honor their right to life and the collective responsibility we share in preventing suicide.

The stark reality that 57% of fatal suicides in Maine in 2021³ were completed using firearms and that a majority of suicide attempts with a firearm are fatal (85-90%)⁴ underscores the urgency of addressing this issue head-on. These are not abstract statistics but real lives that touch every one of us. Critics may argue that those determined to end their lives will find alternative means. However, evidence and experience tell us that reducing access to the most lethal methods can significantly lower suicide rates⁵. The acute nature of suicidal crises—often brief yet intense—underscores the necessity of time and distance as lifesaving buffers⁶. This bill is not about restricting freedoms but about expanding the toolkit for survival, providing a voluntary measure for those of us who are seeking to protect ourselves in moments of crisis or predicted moments of acute distress.

LD 2119 offers a tangible, evidence-based^{7 8 9} step towards reducing the toll of these losses, a measure that complements broader strategies for mental health and suicide prevention. Living with a mental health disorder requires not just courage but an ongoing commitment to vigilance, treatment, and strategic safety planning. It's a path marked by the constant need to anticipate and mitigate risks, especially during periods of acute symptoms where the risk of suicidal

¹ McInnis, M. G., Thompson, S. B., Merajver, S. D., & Schneider, C. E. (2021). Suicide prevention and mood disorders: Self-exclusion agreements for firearms as a suicide prevention strategy. *Asia-Pacific Psychiatry*, 13(3).

² Swanson, J. W., & Felthous, A. R. (2015). Guns, mental illness, and the law: Introduction to this issue. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 33(2–3).

³ CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2024). *WISQARS Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2021*.

⁴ Conner, A., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2019). Suicide case-fatality rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 171(12).

⁵ Vars, F. E. (2020). Voluntary Do-Not-Sell Lists — an innovative approach to reducing gun suicides. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 383(14).

⁶ Berman, A. L., Athey, A., & Nestadt, P. S. (2021). Effectiveness of restricting access to a suicide jump site: a test of the method substitution hypothesis. *Injury Prevention*, 28(1), 90–92.

⁷ Swanson, J. W. (2021). Preventing suicide through better firearm safety policy in the United States. *Psychiatric Services*, 72(2), 174–179.

⁸ Pallin, R., & Barnhorst, A. (2021). Clinical strategies for reducing firearm suicide. *Injury Epidemiology*, 8(1).

⁹ Houtsmä, C., Butterworth, S., & Anestis, M. (2018). Firearm suicide: Pathways to risk and methods of prevention. *Current Opinion in Psychology*.

ideation and behavior is highest¹⁰. LD 2119 promotes a society where every individual is empowered to take proactive steps toward their safety.

Navigating the complexities of gun reform and gun-related deaths presents significant challenges, often polarizing public opinion and legislative efforts¹¹. In this context, LD 2119 stands out as a reasoned, bipartisan approach that carefully balances the right to own firearms with the imperative to protect vulnerable individuals from harm. By enabling individuals to voluntarily limit their access to firearms during periods of crisis, this legislation respects personal freedoms while offering a proactive, life-saving tool for suicide prevention.

In conclusion, I urge you to support LD 2119. By passing this bill, we affirm the value of every life, honor the struggle of those facing mental health challenges, and take a pragmatic step towards a future with fewer lives lost. Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to the well-being of all Mainers.

Sincerely,

Lauren Porter
Naples, Maine

¹⁰ Høyen, K. S., Cohen, L. J., Solem, S., Prestmo, A., Sørensen, K., Salvesen, Ø., Hjemdal, O., Vaaler, A., & Torgersen, T. (2022). Exploring associations between the Modular Assessment of Risk for Imminent Suicide (MARIS) questionnaire and recent suicidal ideation and behavior among patients admitted at an acute psychiatric inpatient department. *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 77(3), 266–275.

¹¹ Gostin, L. O. (2016). 4 Simple reforms to address mass shootings and other firearm violence. *JAMA*, 315(5), 453.