



Maine Education Association
Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony in support of
LD 2086 "An Act to Amend the Law Governing the Disposition of Forfeited Firearms",
including the Sponsor Amendment
And
LD 2119 "An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm
Rights", including the Sponsor Amendment
Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
March 5, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher, on leave, serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine public schools, in our institutions of higher education, as well as retired and aspiring educators.

I am presenting this testimony in support of LD 2086, "An Act to Amend the Law Governing the Disposition of Forfeited Firearms" with the Sponsor's Amendment, and LD 2119, "An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm Rights" with the Sponsor's Amendment, and I am presenting this on behalf of our educators who work with and support the students in Maine as well as on behalf of the wellbeing of those students.

Before October 25, 2023, every time I heard of yet another mass shooting anywhere, I felt a deep sense of horror and profound sorrow. Horror and sorrow that humans could commit such acts, that they had access to the means to commit such acts. Horror and sorrow that there were not more protections in place to help prevent such tragedies. Added then were the worry and concern not only about the impact on those most immediately affected, but also worry and concern for us all--because these horrific acts *do affect each and every one of us*. Those that did not know that before October 25th, most likely do now.

Any time I have heard that an individual has taken their own life, no matter their age, but most especially when it has been a young person, I have also felt such deep sorrow—for the individual, for their family and friends. And then also comes the worry that hearing of one suicide could potentially cause what is referred to as 'suicide contagion' and further loss of life.

As educators, we care deeply about the wellbeing of the children we work with. We are there to teach and support, and when students feel fear, when students have been traumatized, if students don't feel safe—they can't do their best in school, despite the tremendous effort our educators and schools make to help them deal with these challenges.

Of course, our educators are affected, too—always in the back of our minds are the "what ifs?"—the "what will I do if the unthinkable happens?" We push it to the back of our minds so we can focus on the students and the tasks at hand. But the thoughts creep back to the forefront often, too often, and we have them every time another 'event' occurs. Each time the thoughts are harder to push back. How much

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longer will we be able to push back these thoughts if we keep seeing the epidemic of gun violence spread?

I know you have heard statistics like this: more children's deaths are due to firearms than to any other cause¹. Or this: "Firearms account for 20% of all child and teen deaths in the U.S., compared to an average of less than 2% of child and teen deaths in similarly large and wealthy nations"¹.

As our elected officials you can help take actions so that there is less likelihood, less possibility of yet another tragedy happening, at least in our state.

The effects of October 25 are long-lasting. Some of us, many of us, will be affected forever. Lives irrevocably changed, damaged.

Educators care about our students, about our communities, about our families, our own children, ourselves.

I am confident that you care, too. Please show that you do care by passing these two bills, LD 2086 as amended by the sponsor and LD 2119 as amended by the sponsor. While more is needed--a complete ban on the sale and transfer of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines--each piece of common-sense gun safety legislation moves us in the right direction and will help reduce the chance of yet another senseless loss of life.

Thank you for your time and for hearing the concerns of so many who want to see our state be a safe place where we can all live and thrive and where our children can learn and grow and reach their full potential.

I am glad to answer any questions you may have.

¹<https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries/#>