



March 5, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Mooney, and Members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is John Hennessy, and I am the Public Advocacy Director for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. I offer this testimony in support of LD 2086 - An Act to Amend the Law Governing the Disposition of Forfeited Firearms and LD 2119 An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm Rights

The Episcopal Church strongly supports all efforts to address America's unique and shameful gun violence crisis. It is out of love for the living God, and reverence for human life, that Episcopal Peace Fellowship – Maine calls upon the Legislature to act decisively to limit access to deadly firearms and invest in proven efforts to interrupt violence and make our communities safer.

We reiterate our urgent call for legislation that will add reasonable restrictions on firearm ownership, require universal background checks, ban assault weapons and other rapid fire devices, eliminate loopholes, tighten laws against gun trafficking, require gun safety training, fund gun violence and suicide prevention programs, and address gun violence as a public health crisis.

The heart of our state was broken by a mass shooting in Lewiston last October. As Christians, we believe deeply in the power of prayer to console, to sustain and to heal, but also to make evident the work that God is calling us to do. We pray that all who have been touched by this violent act receive God's healing and solace.

In the wake of this massacre, we believe God is calling us to understand that we must not simply identify the social and political impediments to ending these lethal spasms of violence in our country. We must reflect on and acknowledge our own complicity in the unjust systems that facilitate so many deaths, and, in accordance with the keeping of a holy Lent, repent and make reparations.

As beloved children of God seeking to love and serve one another, we are called to bring hope to all people and strive for physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing for all. This means we cannot ignore the pain of people who might find themselves isolated, experiencing trauma, or suffering from mental illness. People in these circumstances may be at risk for self-directed harm with the intent to die.

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People at risk for suicide attempt; attempt survivors; and the families, friends, and communities of the victims of death by suicide need the love, support, and care of close relationships and community.

To those who say these, and other measures being proposed would have done nothing to prevent the tragedy in Lewiston, we ask you to consider they might prevent the next one. Please support these bills to make our state safer.

About Episcopal Peace Fellowship

The Episcopal Peace Fellowship is an inclusive community rooted in active love. Her members endeavor to follow Jesus into the world, bearing witness to injustice, while striving for justice, and prayerfully expecting that peace will follow. We offer resources to help form human beings who understand that our call to be Christ's hands and feet compels us to live into our Baptismal promise to strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every person. We cannot imagine our lives as followers of Christ without doing the work of social justice advocacy. We are about using our prophetic voices for radical peacemaking. Our places are marked by our dedication to nonviolence, and to creating peace even with those with whom we deeply disagree. Our movement is ever toward the immovable cornerstone, Jesus, who can always be found standing beside the other and the stranger, the oppressed, the marginalized, the disenfranchised, the victims of a broken justice system, the displaced, and those who are alone or who have lost hope.