

Comments to the Committee on Judiciary

in Support of LD 1312

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Good morning Senator Carpenter and Representative Bailey and members of the Committee on Judiciary. Thank you for taking my testimony in support on LD 1312. My name is Tony Owens and I am from Cape Elizabeth.

Having just celebrated my 70th birthday I can reflect back on over 6 decades of gun ownership. Starting with a BB gun, I graduated to a .22 at age 10. By twelve years I owned a centerfire rifle and reloaded my own shells and upon reaching my teen years I hunted every fall with my grandfather for geese and ducks along the marshes of Chesapeake Bay. In college our trap team won the national championship and I shot and reloaded tens of thousands of rounds. Since moving to Maine in 1975 I have hunted every fall for both waterfowl and upland birds. I look forward to days afield in October as some of the best moments of the year.

I own numerous guns including one my father cherished. It was given to him by a German prisoner of war in the prison camp Dad was in charge of. When Mom died suddenly, Dad's dementia and depression worsened. I took the pistol from him over his objection as we worried about his safety. He died suddenly in his sleep two months later.

I wasn't able to do that for my brother-in-law as he took his life with a single pistol shot almost 20 years ago to this day, leaving my sister a widow and his two daughters without a dad.

As an emergency medicine physician at Maine's largest level one trauma center I unfortunately see gun violence on a regular basis. Some of this is intentional, occasionally accidental, and all too often it is done with suicidal intent.

Every day in the Emergency Department we provide medical screening examinations for patients presenting with a mental health concern. Part of that screening involves the question of safety both from potential harm from others as well as possible self harm or thoughts of harming another person. When there is a positive response to questioning the next inquiry is what means they have to act on this impulse. Access to firearms is always part of the interview.

LD 1312 would provide another tool at this point to consider removing the potential lethal means of harming oneself or another. Almost half of Maine's growing number of suicides involve firearms.

As one who continues to enjoy gun ownership, but also has seen both professionally and within my own family the devastating impact of gun violence, I strongly encourage your support of LD 1312.

Tony Owens
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Committee members, Thank you for your service. I have attached my testimony given in person in 2019 on LD1312. I wish I could say that your amendments to this bill accomplished their intended purpose, but the continued increase in gun violence that we witness and I experience in the Emergency Department speak otherwise. I only hope that the horrible cost of the Lewiston shooting emboldens you to take more aggressive action. You have several bills before your committee that would do just that. This is the time to take strong action. Thank you again.