

Testimony to the Judiciary Committee’s Public Hearing on: LD2224, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety by Improving Maine's Firearm Laws and Mental Health System; and LD2238, An Act to Address Gun Violence in Maine by Requiring a Waiting Period for Certain Firearm Purchases

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Committee:

My name is the Rev. Dr. Stephen Hastings, a resident of Winthrop and the Pastor of the Dover-Foxcroft Congregational Church. I have also been pastor at Congregational churches in Winthrop and Kennebunk, and Presbyterian churches in Leeds and Hartford. Today, I submit testimony on behalf of the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ as the Chair of its Social Action Committee **in support of LD2224 and LD2238.**

In the aftermath of the mass shooting event in Lewiston on October 25, 2023 that took the lives of eighteen people and injured many others, the Social Action Committee of the Maine Conference hosted three gatherings across the Conference in early February. Our aim was to:

1. Help people process the grief, and
2. Find meaningful ways to move forward in preventing gun violence.

We did this because as people of faith, we “weep with those who weep.” Adding to the lamentation of weeping, though, Martin Luther King Jr. observed, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” It is clear that gun violence prevention matters to people who are frustrated that conversations usually end with the silence of “thoughts and prayers” and little, if any, redeeming action. And yet, the spiritual mandate for action is clear and pervasive. As Christians and people of faith, we follow one known as the Prince of Peace. We believe in love and non-violence as the powers that heal. We believe in putting away the swords and turning the spears into pruning hooks. In that Spirit, the Maine Conference affirms its commitment to gun violence prevention and its Resolution of 2013 to support laws that:

1. Ban the sale and possession of high-capacity rapid-fire weapons by individuals,
2. Ban the sale and possession of large ammunition magazines by individuals, and
3. Require universal background checks and safety courses for all sales of guns, including sales at gun shows and between private individuals.

Legislation responsive to these three guidelines, all or in part, is now coming before the 131st Maine Legislature. The Maine Conference voices support for LD2224 and LD2238 because they expand the scope of background checks to gun sales not previously covered and put the brakes on gun sales made in haste.

As it says in scripture, “Faith without works is dead.” Please take firm action in the name of those who died in Lewiston and on behalf of those who may yet be spared.

Submitted by,
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