

*LD.2224 - An Act to Strengthen Public Safety by Improving Maine's Firearm Laws and Mental Health System*

March 6, 2024

Testimony for LD 2224

To the Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Please support LD 2224 and vote “Ought to Pass.” Gun violence has become the Number 1 public health crisis in our state and our nation as a whole. We must summon the political will to take strong action. LD.2224 would make some modest changes to make it easier to evaluate people in crisis and issue yellow flag orders where appropriate.

When used well, Yellow Flag can be an important tool for law enforcement to remove access to firearms from someone when they are experiencing a mental health crisis **and** are a threat to themselves or others.

I am glad to see the increase in awareness about the dangerousness of firearms during a crisis, which has led to a major increase in the use of the yellow flag law since the shooting in Lewiston last October. This increase shows just how many Mainers need help and shows just how desperate the need is for their loved ones and local law enforcement officials to have more tools to separate those Mainers in crisis from deadly weapons and stop prevent tragedies before they happen.

Law Enforcement officials are asking for more tools to keep their communities safe by removing access to firearms for those who are a danger to themselves or others **but** may not meet the threshold for a medical determination.

It is important to note that most people who are mentally ill are **not** more likely to commit acts of violence. And people who **are** at an elevated or immediate risk of committing acts of violence or self-harm are **not** necessarily mentally ill. With that in mind, it is critical, when looking to prevent tragedies, that we **focus on behaviors and not a false equivalence between mental health diagnoses and violence.**

Also, family members are often the first people to notice that their loved one needs help. That’s why family members need a process that makes it easier for them to get dangerous weapons away from someone who is a threat to themselves or others.

LD 2224 will provide mental health professionals with additional sources of evidence and information to come to a correct diagnosis. Law enforcement will have an additional tool to take someone into protective custody in order to have them evaluated.

Gun violence has become a public health emergency, as evidenced by the two horrific mass shootings here in Maine—Bowdoin and Lewiston. On October 25, 2023, eighteen

people were killed and thirteen more injured in Lewiston. Because I live just three miles from the mass shooting and because the shooter's children attended public schools in our district, the impact of this tragedy rippled into my neighborhood where there were many social connections with the shooter, his family, and several victims. By banning assault weapons and the parts that allow weapons to be converted into mass killing machines, the Maine Legislature we can go a long way toward protecting public health and safety, and I urge you to do so in the strongest terms.

I am a retired public-school teacher with a forty-year career of service to children and young adults in the K-20 educational system. Since the multiple school shootings in our country including the gunning down of young children in their classroom at Sandy Hook Elementary, schools have instituted lock-down drills. I would like to see the legislature take swift and decisive action. Just think—it could be your child, grandchild, or beloved family member who is slaughtered next.

Sincerely,

Robin Brooks

She, hers

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