



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: Senator Margaret Rotundo, D – Androscoggin; Representative Kristen Sarah Cloutier, D – Lewisto; President Troy D. Jackson, D – Aroostook; Senator Matthea Daughtry, D – Cumberland; Senator Eloise A. Vitelli, D – Sagadahoc; Representative Maureen Fitzgerald Terry, D – Gorham; Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross, D - Portland

March 7, 2024

My name is the Kathy Woodside, a resident of Bar Harbor and a lay leader of the Bar Harbor Congregational Church United Church of Christ. I am offering testimony on behalf of the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC) and as a member of its Social Action Committee to **offer written testimony in support of LD 2224 and LD 2238.**

I offer my testimony from a somewhat different perspective than Stephen Hastings, the chair of the Maine Conference UCC's Social Action Committee. I support his testimony wholeheartedly, but I would like to offer a personal perspective. I grew up in Northern Maine in a hunting culture, as a child, my family depended on the annual deer hunt for food. It was a way of life...one that I did not question. A gun in the home was not uncommon, but in my home not visible until hunting season. Hunting accidents, resulting in death or injury may have happened, but I don't remember it to be a common occurrence. That would have been over sixty years ago. As they say – "times have changed". For many in our current culture, gun ownership is no longer about hunting as sport or for food. Some may claim they own a gun for protection. Protection from what -- other gun owners who may be violent and shoot to kill? This way of thinking can only result in more violence. It's an accident waiting to happen or a situation gone wrong, resulting in a mass shooting.

The first mass shooting that I recall Columbine High School (Colorado) in 1999, when twelve students and one teacher were murdered and twenty-one others were injured. This pattern of violence has not only continued in the last two decades but has increased in frequency. Up until the mass shooting event on October 25, 2023 in Lewiston, Maine has been somewhat immune to this type of violence. Many have taken the attitude that it can't happen here...not in the state where the motto is "life...the way it should be". While others of who have seen repeated gun safety laws squelched in our legislature and mental health resources gutted...it was only a matter of time before we would experience what other communities have suffered.

The recent violence in Lewiston became even more personal for me when I learned that an extended family member who is part of the deaf community who frequented the bowling alley where the shooting took place on October 25th was a victim of the violence, that until that fateful day, had always been a safe gathering place for she and her friends. Her husband was injured and two friends were killed. Their grief and loss is personal...and life changing. This type of scenario cannot be allowed to play out in our state ever again...Maine can do better.

For decades, efforts have been made by many gun safety advocates across this country, but legislation continues to fall short in creating laws that make our country as safe as other developed countries throughout the world who have stricter gun laws. The 131st Maine Legislature has an opportunity to create laws that will do just that. The Maine Conference United Church of Christ and the Social Action Committee support LD 2224 and LD 2238 because they expand the purview of background checks to gun sales not previously covered and limit the ability to purchase guns made in haste. I personally support this legislation because it is time to be proactive...to make a preemptive move to strike gun violence from the landscape of our precious state. I urge you to do the same...to take the lead...to do what others have not had the courage to do.

Submitted by,

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