

Cathy Harris
Mechanic Falls
LD 2224

March 7, 2024

Dear Honorary Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Cathy Harris and I am writing in support of LD 2224, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety by Improving Maine's Firearm Laws and Mental Health System. I am a mother, grandmother and retired teacher. I live in Mechanic Falls, only 10 miles from Lewiston. The tragic shooting that occurred in our community in October was heartbreaking.

I do not regard the shooter as a "bad guy". He was clearly in a state of mental crisis and gave numerous warning signs about his state of mind and his intentions. When his grainy picture flashed over our news outlets, it was his family who identified him and who had to contact the authorities. My mother had Lewy body Dementia. She suffered horrible hallucinations both visual and auditory. I know what it is like when someone you love becomes someone you don't recognize. But my mother did not have access to a Ruger AR-10 or Smith and Weston AR-15.

Several years ago a friend of mind confided in me that her father, who had Alzheimer's Disease and lived with her family, entered their kitchen one morning with his rifle and threatened to shoot her and her teenage son. Thankfully the weapon was not loaded. This man, who had been a hunter his entire life, would never have done such a thing in his normal state of mind. Families need resources in place when situations like this occur.

In the interest of public safety there needs to be a doable, effective and efficient process to quickly separate an individual in a state of mental crisis from their weapons so that they cannot harm themselves or anyone else. The shooting in Lewiston was totally preventable. The victims did nothing wrong. They were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time and what happened to them could happen to any one of us or to those we love.

It is grossly irresponsible for anyone to throw their hands in the air and say there was nothing we could have done. I urge you, as legislators, to do all that you can to prevent a tragedy like the Lewiston shooting from happening again.

Regarding background checks. If a background check is required to purchase a gun at Walmart or Cabala's it should be require at ALL points of sale. It is short sighted to allow loop holes to remain in a system that is designed to prevent prohibited individuals from obtaining weapons.

Thank you.

Cathy Harris
Mechanic Falls, Maine