



Testimony of Melissa Hackett

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In support of LD 2224, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety by Improving Maine's Firearm Laws and Mental Health System; and LD 2238, An Act to Address Gun Violence in Maine by Requiring a Waiting Period for Certain Firearm Purchases

March 7, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Melissa Hackett, policy associate at the Maine Children's Alliance. We are a statewide, non-partisan organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies and best practices to improve the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families.

We all want our children to grow up safe and healthy in their communities. As parents, adults, and decision-makers, it is our responsibility to take the necessary measures to keep them safe. When we cannot limit access to a firearm for youth and adults when they pose a risk to themselves or others, we miss an opportunity to prevent tragedies of suicide or community violence. And when adults can purchase firearms without commonsense background checks and "cooling off" periods, we miss an opportunity to reduce the risk of violent crime and domestic violence in our communities that can be lethal when there are firearms involved.

As child advocates, we join the American Academy of Pediatrics in supporting the policies of background checks, extreme risk protection orders, and waiting periods to prevent children from experiencing firearm-related injury, violence, and related trauma. Firearm injuries are a significant public health issue, contributing substantially to premature death and disability of children. Notably, provisional CDC data from 2022 indicate that firearms continued to be the number one factor nationally in child deaths for the third year in a row.<sup>1</sup>

Responsible gun safety measures play a critical role in keeping Maine children and families safe. Universal background checks ensure firearms remain in the hands of responsible gun owners and do not get into the hands of individuals with demonstrated histories of domestic violence or crime. Current law provides a loophole in allowing for private sales without this check. The majority of Americans are in favor of closing this loophole – including 84% of gun owners (regardless of partisanship) who favor background checks on sales of all weapons.<sup>2</sup> Through the implementation of this proposed state law, we can close this dangerous loophole, ensuring that all individuals purchasing a gun receive a background check, so firearms don't get into the wrong hands, which puts our children and families at risk. This may also help to reduce rates of teen suicide; in states that require a background check for private handgun sales, there are 48% fewer firearm suicides, while the rates of suicide by other means are nearly identical.<sup>3</sup>

Under current law, there is no waiting period requirement for the purchase of a gun, even when we know that can help to reduce the number of prohibited individuals from purchasing a gun, as well as

those who may purchase a firearm with the intent of suicide. Firearms remain the most lethal form of suicide, with 9 out of 10 attempts with a gun resulting in death.<sup>4</sup> Waiting periods can help address this impulsiveness, especially for teenagers experiencing a temporary crisis. This has borne out in other states with similar laws, resulting in 51% fewer firearm suicides than states without these laws.<sup>4</sup> Another study showed that these same states also experienced a 17% reduction in gun homicides.<sup>5</sup>

It is our job to protect the safety and well-being of children and youth in communities across our state. When there is domestic violence in the home, and a parent has access to a firearm, the children in that home are not safe. When a teenager or adult is struggling with a difficult experience, and they have easy access to a firearm, they are not safe to themselves and put their communities at risk. While federal laws have left holes in the laws regarding responsible gun sales and ownership, we have the ability – and responsibility - as a state to implement and enforce laws that go further to protect our youngest citizens and to ensure firearms are only accessible and in the hands of responsible gun owners.

Thank you for your consideration.

### **References**

1. Kaiser, <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries/>
2. Ipsos, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/npr-gun-owners-2022>
3. American Academy of Pediatrics, Universal Background Checks for Gun Purchases, [www.aap.org/stateadvocacy](http://www.aap.org/stateadvocacy)
4. Andrew Conner, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, “Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014: A Nationwide Population-Based Study,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 171, no. 12 (2019): 885–95, <https://doi.org/10.7326/M19-1324>
5. American Academy of Pediatrics, Waiting Periods for Firearm Purchases, [www.aap.org/stateadvocacy](http://www.aap.org/stateadvocacy)