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Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I appreciate your time, and service to the people of Maine. You don't have an easy job today.

I am commenting today as a parent, business owner, and as board president for Maine Summer Camps.

I am in favor of the proposed bill. We need better gun violence protection laws in order to keep our community safe, and save the lives of our neighbors and kids.

In April of last year, my son and I were taking our dog home from the vet when we passed the southbound exit 15 in Yarmouth. We noticed police arriving on the scene of an apparent wreck on the off-ramp, and a traffic back up. We didn't think much of it, until we got home and my wife texted me to tell me there was a gunman on the loose in Yarmouth, yards away from where we had driven 10 minutes earlier. After the story unfolded, I lay awake that night wondering how close my son had been to an armed gunman. 50 yards? 100?. I didn't sleep much.

On October 25th of last year, my phone started going off with dozens of text messages after 8pm. That isn't normal for me. It was friends, former campers, staff, camp parents, from across the country and around the world, checking in if we were safe, and asking how a tragedy like the Lewiston shooting had happened here, in Maine. These sort of things weren't meant to happen in Maine. What was going on? I felt a pit in my stomach, even with the earliest, scant details.

Over the subsequent days, as details emerged of the actions of a man armed with an AR-15 style rifle who took 18 lives, the pit in my stomach only grew. As fellow camp directors detailed the helicopters circling overhead their camps as a hunt for a gunman continued, the news hit that our amazing, tight knit industry had lost one of our best. Joshua Seal, founder of Dirigo Experience at Pine Tree Camps, was one of the victims. One of our best, most inspiring leaders was gone, and for no reason. It was senseless, random, and avoidable.

Maine is a small state. We all know people who were lost to gun violence that day in Lewiston. We all know people who have lost loved ones – parents, siblings, kids, to gun violence in the ongoing, rolling epidemic of avoidable, preventable gun deaths. Every violent act and gun death impacts a massive percentage of our states population.

Representing one of the largest collaborations of youth development professionals in the state, I am urging you to take decisive action to reduce and prevent gun violence in the state of Maine. Gun violence is the leading cause of death among people under the age of 18, and Maine has one of the highest suicide rates in New England, due to the prevalence of firearm suicides. I implore you to do the hard work needed to keep our communities safe. Our neighbors, and especially our kids, are depending on it.