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My written testimony for gun safety is exemplified by a specific situation that involves a friend.

I wish I was the primary source for this situation but I feel compelled to present it as well as I can as a secondary source for a story that shows what happens when gun owners are "bad neighbors". Because I am respecting the wishes of my friend (JB) not to be identified, I am only going to state that this involves a small neighborhood of approximately 6 houses on a point of land that goes out to an inlet and the neighborhood has a private road.

I have heard many times from JB about various incidents of irresponsible (although legal) gun use over the past 5 years by this specific neighbor who now frequently threatens JB. Prior to that, he had a relatively amicable relationship with this man and for that reason JB was in his house fixing a window several years ago. At the time, he saw that this man owned over 15 guns of a variety of styles and the window had been shot out by the man as he took aim at a small animal outside. For many years this man has been shooting small animals and has entertained himself by shooting out over the water in a reciprocal gun shooting game by others from across the inlet. When he goes out in his car, he has been seen to have several guns in the front seat.

He was a former State Trooper (not in Maine) and has bragged about his harassment of citizens while he was on the force. This man is married but his wife does not live with him. She visits at times and there have been loud arguments that took place during those visits with threatening language and obscenities and threats to her safety, witnessed by neighbors.

At one point he aimed his high powered rifle at members of the family who live in one of the houses, both mother and children, while they were kayaking. This was brought up in conversation but never reported.

He speeds down the road making walking on the road dangerous. The kids now don't go out on the road. There has been a lot of stress in the neighborhood regarding this man's behavior. Other members of the neighborhood have made statements in the past about their own safety concerns but have retracted these statements when there was an opportunity to join JB in bringing charges against this man. There is now a divide in this small neighborhood between those who want to placate him and those who want to do something about his behavior.

Conflicts between this man and JB arose from other incidents related to road work payments not provided by this man and his questionable personal use of road funds when he was in charge of the road association. I cannot personally validate all of this but have heard about these situations for many years and because this man is known to have so many guns and has an anger management issue, it is a source of constant stress as the relationship has become adversarial.

JB has, over the past 2 years, been threatened by this man verbally, by voicemail and by texts. (I have personally seen the texts). These threatening and obscene voicemails and texts include statement such as "I'm going to give you a third eye" and have been shared with law enforcement.

JB's mailbox has been sabotaged several times -a federal offense - over the past few months, including feces type liquid poured over the mailbox. There was also mail tampering. A few days ago there was blood over the mailbox, but without proof, law enforcement cannot act on this incident. This man, however, bragged in past years that he had sabotaged another neighbors mailbox when he had a conflict with her.

JB has obtained an order similar to a restraining order due to the verbal threats and gestures and statements. But that just keeps the man from coming onto the property. The man can stand at the road and do whatever he wants. Although the neighbors may not want to get law enforcement involved because they do not want to provoke this man, no one feels safe there.

I am trying to figure out how the yellow flag laws would be helpful here. There is ample evidence to show this man is intimidating his neighbors and harassing some of them. He doesn't have to be mentally ill to do this so yellow flag laws would not help in this instance. However, his possession of an arsenal, as well as being extremely intimidating to neighbors, sets up an impossible situation for law enforcement. He has bragged about having enough ammunition to hold off anyone attempting to remove his guns.

Consider all of his actions; breaking his own window to shoot at animals, shooting out over the water for entertainment, shooting small animals, aiming at kids and neighbors while kayaking, traveling with multiple firearms on the seat of his car (legal but another source of intimidation), speeding down the road so that it is not safe to walk, leaving threatening voicemails and texts, making life very stressful certainly for JB (who already has several congenital heart issues), and for others on the road, and is most likely the source of mailbox and mail sabotage for JB, how are we going to prevent an incident of gun shooting if and when this man feels provoked?

The neighbors should not need to fear such retribution and have to placate this man. I can understand why my testimony might not hold much weight because I am not the primary source but again, the reason for that is fear of this man's guns. I am outraged by the protections provided to this man. Is it fair that JB is told his only solution for his mail issue is to pay for a postbox? Is it fair that he now feels he must sell this property if he ever wants to get a good nights sleep? Is it good for Maine that the protections for gun ownership and the difficulty in demanding proper safety and appropriate use of guns outweigh the protections to those who are being subjected to threats, harassment and fear?

I think that one of the takeaways from this story is that those who are at risk may be too fearful to bring attention to the situations that can lead to a dangerous shooting. I also want my legislators to know that those of us who do not see guns as protective are not wrong. Responsible gun owners and those of us who do not own guns deserve more protections through legislation.

SEP