

Testimony of Dr. Paul Kuehnert, DNP, RN, CPH, FAAN

In Support of LDs 2224 and 2238

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee: my name is Dr. Paul Kuehnert and I live in Hallowell, Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon and express my support for the common-sense gun safety measures that are proposed in LDs 2224 and 2238.

I stand before you as a father, a grandfather, and a nurse---a nurse who has spent more than 45 years in community and public health practice working to protect and promote the health of families and children as a visiting nurse, a school nurse, a pediatric nurse practitioner, a local health department director, founding director of the Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response here in Maine in 2002, Deputy State Health Officer here in 2005 and 2006, and now the President and CEO of the Public Health Accreditation Board, the national accrediting body for state, local, Tribal and U.S. Army health departments in the U.S.

I am here with you today because my heart aches, aches to point of breaking, for the families in Lewiston and other towns across Maine and across our country who have lost loved ones to the epidemic of gun violence, be those losses suffered in the horror of mass shootings, the terror of domestic violence, or the agony of suicide. As a professional who has dedicated my life to the well being of children, families, and communities I am particularly heartbroken by the fact that since 2020 firearms became the leading cause of death in children in the U.S.

We can and must do better. We must act to protect our children, our families, and our communities in Maine.

LDs 2224 and 2238 are major steps in the right direction that will help protect Maine families, children, and communities. The provisions in these bills are based in solid research and public policy evaluations published by reputable national organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Public Health Association.

Additionally, I would urge you to go further and include language that enables extreme risk protection orders in Maine, a critical tool for saving lives when someone is in crisis and there are visible warning signs of their potential for harm to themselves or others.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and share my recommendation to strengthen and pass LD 2224 and 2238.