

To: Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

From: Louise Gephart, Brunswick, ME 04011

Re: Support for LD 2283: **An Act to Enact the Crisis Intervention Order Act to Protect the Safety of the Public**

Intro: Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Louise Gephart and I live in Brunswick, Maine.

Testimony:

I am a mother, grandmother, citizen, and a retired Clinical Social Worker. I am also a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church. All these ways that I identify myself call me to speak out to reduce the loss of human life due to the epidemic of gun violence in our country, and in our state. My faith values the worth and dignity of every person within the interdependent web of our existence. Because of this belief I value preservation of life over the temporary loss of the right of access to firearms when a person is at risk of using a weapon to cause harm to themselves or others. I consider myself very fortunate not to have had to deal with concerns about firearms within my personal life, but I have had to do so in my professional life. More than once I have worked with people who had serious concerns about family members whom they felt were of extreme risk to themselves or others because of the combination of life crises and access to firearms. I saw the agony that these people experienced – the fear and the sense of helplessness that they felt, and the extreme pain when, in one case, a family member shot himself and died. It is very important that family members and others concerned parties be given the ability to act quickly and effectively to have firearms removed in situations where they perceive extreme risk. The requirement that the individual be taken into police custody and taken for a mental health evaluation is a barrier to the swift action that is needed in such situations. As an experience mental health professional, I know that mental health evaluations are not the answer to the problem in these situations. Diagnosis of a mental illness is not a predictor of gun violence. Knowledge of a person's behavior, both current and prior, and his/her current emotional state and statements is. The people closest to the person – family members, co-workers and close friends have this knowledge, and need to be able act upon it to protect their loved ones.

I am very much in favor of expansion of much needed mental health services in Maine, such as those proposed in LD 2238. However, I do believe that this must be separated from the extreme risk protection that LD 2283 would provide. It allows for swift and efficient action by concerned family members to provide safety for their loved one and for the public. Once this action has been taken, there is time other mental health services, domestic violence prevention, and public safety supports to be put in place.

I urge you to think about how you would want to be able to respond if believed that someone you loved was at extreme risk of harm to themselves or someone else. I sincerely hope that you find it within yourself to send this bill out of your Committee as "ought to pass. Thank you.