



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
An Act to Enact the Crisis Intervention Order Act to Protect the Safety of the Public

April 5, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and Members of the Committee:

I am Jane Field, Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, a coalition of seven mainline Protestant denominations with over 400 local churches in Maine that have more than 50,000 parishioners in their care. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in support of LD 2283**.

In March, I told you about the unprecedented outpouring of concern and demands for passing gun safety legislation that we have been hearing from churches across Maine, and I explained this was because of our deepest held beliefs and core values and because in any church anywhere in Maine you will find people in the pews, and clergy in the pulpits, who have been directly, profoundly, impacted by gun violence.

Throughout my own career in parish ministry, I have been called on to offer pastoral care to families shattered by the devastation of having a loved one use a gun to commit suicide. I've walked with them through the valley of the shadow of death, and comforted them as they cried, "If only we could have done more to prevent this!"

I have had to look into the eyes of two teenaged girls in my church's youth group as their mother broke the news to them that their father had taken his own life using a gun, and then watch as, over the next few years, their young lives spun out of control in response to that trauma.

I have stood outside in the freezing cold at midnight with a parishioner as police entered her home to investigate the scene of her husband's suicide with a gun. And I returned the next morning to help her wash his blood from the living room walls before her two children made it home from college. She didn't want those walls to reveal to her son and daughter what a horrific scene had occurred in the only home they'd ever known.

Sadly, as dramatic and shocking as these stories are, they are not unique. They're not even unusual. My clergy colleagues from every denomination and faith tradition could tell you similar stories from their own ministries. And all of us have heard survivors ask again and again, "Why wasn't there something we could have done to prevent this? If only... If only..."

The bill before you today, LD 2283, provides a way for families to take meaningful and effective steps to prevent these tragedies. States that already have a way for families to get Extreme Risk Protection Orders have seen a significant reduction in firearm suicides—for example, in our New England neighbor, Connecticut, the number has been reduced by 14%. By permitting family members to seek a court order, instead of requiring law enforcement to navigate the complex, stigmatizing provisions set forth in Maine's current yellow flag law or in the measures put forward by Governor Mills in LD 2224, LD 2283 would give Maine families a tool they can use to lower the risk that a loved one in crisis will use a gun to end their own life.

You've heard again and again in testimony before you this legislative session that 90% of gun deaths in Maine are suicides. The families who have suffered these losses hope and pray that no one else will have to endure such heartache and pain. Instituting ERPO's in Maine is a significant step we can take to answer those prayers. Therefore, we are asking you to vote Ought To Pass on LD 2283.

*Episcopal Diocese of Maine, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA),
Religious Society of Friends, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church*

Jane Field
Maine Council of Churches
LD 2283

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The bill before you today, LD 2238, provides a way for families to take meaningful and effective steps to prevent these tragedies. States that already have a way for families to get Extreme Risk Protection Orders have seen a significant reduction in firearm suicides—for example, in our New England neighbor, Connecticut, the number has been reduced by 14%. By permitting family members to seek a court order, instead of requiring law enforcement to navigate the complex, stigmatizing provisions set forth in Maine's current yellow flag law or in the measures put forward by Governor Mills in LD 2224, LD 2238 would give Maine families a tool they can use to lower the risk that a loved one in crisis will use a gun to end their own life.

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