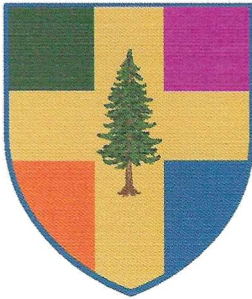


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April 4, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is John Hennessy. I am the Advocacy Director for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine offering testimony in support of **LD 2283 – An Act to Enact the Crisis Intervention Order Act to Protect the Safety of the Public.**

The Episcopal Church strongly supports all efforts to address America's unique and shameful gun violence crisis. We are active members of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition. It is out of love for the living God, and reverence for human life, that Episcopal Peace Fellowship - Maine calls upon the Legislature to act decisively to limit access to deadly firearms and invest in proven efforts to interrupt violence and make our communities safer.

Extreme risk protection orders (ERPO's), also known as red flag laws, are an effective means to de-escalate an emergency and save lives. They allow law enforcement officers, after an evidentiary hearing and court order that must meet specified standards, to temporarily remove a gun from the possession of someone who is experiencing a mental health crisis and who is determined by a judge to be at risk of harming themselves or others with a firearm. If such a finding is made, the gun is taken into custody by law enforcement. Within a short time thereafter a second hearing is held when additional evidence may be presented to determine if the initial order should be extended.

Most religious Americans believe gun reform is necessary to save lives. Religious Americans overwhelmingly support commonsense policies aimed at gun violence prevention. One study found that most Americans affiliated with a religious community – 84 percent of Buddhist, Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslims – support background checks for all gun sales.

We know the United States faces an epidemic of gun violence. In fact, around 41,000 Americans die from gun violence every year, and according to the American Association of Pediatrics, gun violence is now the leading cause of death for American children. Let me repeat that, the leading cause of death for American children is gun violence.

As a result of this epidemic, nearly every American will know someone affected by gun violence. For the people of Maine, that tragic fact became very real on October 25, 2023, when 18 people were killed and 13 more injured in the shooting in Lewiston, ME.

A red flag law may well have prevented the Lewiston shooting and in Maine 85% of gun deaths are suicides. Family members often know best if a loved one is suffering from a mental health crisis, has access to a firearm and if there is a significant risk the person will use it to harm themselves or others. Having to arrange a medical evaluation in addition to a court order takes more time than

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they may have to avert a tragedy and placing that loved one in custody even more traumatizing.

We are glad to see the increase in awareness about the danger of firearms during a crisis, which has led to a major increase in the use of the yellow flag law since the shooting in Lewiston last October. This increase shows just how many Mainers need help and shows just how desperate the need is for their loved ones and local law enforcement officials to have more tools to separate those Mainers in crisis from deadly weapons and stop prevent tragedies before they happen. Law enforcement officials are asking for more tools to keep their communities safe by removing access to firearms for those who are a danger to themselves or others but may not meet the threshold for a medical determination.

We believe our leaders in Augusta must create additional processes for temporarily getting guns out of the hands of people who are a threat to themselves or others. Law enforcement needs more tools to keep their communities safe, and families need more ways to get their loved one's help.

To those who say these, and other measures being proposed would have done nothing to prevent the tragedy in Lewiston, we ask you to consider they might prevent the next one. Please support this bill to make our state safer.