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My name is Kip DeSerres. I am 76 years old and live in Portland. I am retired from a career in public health, and am a past president of the Maine Public Health Association. After a career in public health, I understand that gun violence is a public health crisis, and that real “red flag” laws are one powerful way to prevent gun violence. But that is not why I am testifying today.

I am here for my daughter, Tracy, who died 10 years ago. She was a wonderful, loving person, but my oldest daughter suffered from mental illness most of her life. She had many good years, when life was stable for her. But the forces of depression increased and, with that, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts. She had spent time in mental health treatment, both inpatient and outpatient. The several suicide attempts were with pills, and she thankfully did not overdose. Once, when she was living in Vermont, I found that she had a gun, and as I was not far away, took it from her.

In 2013, at age 43, she had moved to South Carolina, and her depression was getting worse. On a phone call, she told me that she once again had a gun. She thought she needed it for self protection, but I knew that the greater danger was that she would turn it on herself. I contemplated calling the local police, but knew that they would not take her gun, given the laws in South Carolina.

She texted me the evening of January 13, 2014, to assure me that she would make an appointment with her psychiatrist, stop drinking, and would not do anything to herself. Hours later, on January 14, she shot herself in the heart. She was drinking, and it may have been partially accidental.

I have gone through all kinds of second guessing about whether I should have called the local police on January 12. I do believe that if there had been a red flag law in that state at that time, that I may have taken action to take her gun. Suicide by gun is final.

I urge the Maine Legislature to pass a red flag law.