

Members of the Judiciary Committee,
Thank you for letting me submit testimony on an issue that is personal to me.

LD2283 "An Act to Enact the Crisis Intervention Order Act to Protect the Safety of the Public"
Sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross must be voted Ought to pass.

My name is Marie Follayttar(Smith) and I live in South Portland. I'm on leave due to severe PASC(Long covid) from Mainers for Accountable Leadership.

A red flag law is critical to the safety of our community and our loved ones.

In 2015 my ex-husband spent the year in multiple hospitals with extreme suicidal ideations.

We were living in rural Delaware county, New York. It's "upstate:" a red district where few elections are contested. His family were the original dairy farmers and his dad the town dentist growing up.

We were caring for my father-in-law whose gun collection was important to him; guns on either side of the fireplace with hunting trophies all around the house including a trophy of his first deer caught as a young boy. The glass gun case was usually locked and bullets were separated and guns were in containers under guest room beds and on display.

The social worker at the mental hospital called me to prepare for the discharge of my ex-husband and asked if we had any guns on the property. NY has a red flag law. I was afraid of the guns: an accident killed a friend's father and another friend. My ex-husband was struggling to find a will to live and just walking into the kitchen was a trip past gun displays. But I thought it would be 'easy. 'After all, it was his life at risk. It was hell. My father-in-law wanted his guns and I had to fight to create safety. Was there a law in place? Yes. But I had to manage it and I had to manage the discussions while coping with the heartbreak, anxiety and utterly overwhelming nature of loving someone so much who wanted to die and not wanting him to know I was fighting to ensure he came home to a safe home.

I didn't know when my ex-husband would try to use a gun to harm himself instead of pills. By that point he had attempted to kill himself dozens of times over the years. I was unwilling to take a chance and the hospital staff backed me up. We were able to ensure that all guns were locked up after I managed the conversations.

But I was alone. There were no programs to support me. There was no social worker to help me manage the struggle and give me tools to talk with my father-in-law. There was no follow up from the hospital or providers. With mental health care capacity issues in hospitals he was in a hospital 4 hours away from us because all beds in closer facilities were full. My visits took all day for the hour or two I could see him. We got through that moment and no one was harmed outwardly.

We must ensure this bill passes and that guns are not around people who are high risk for suicide or for violent action.

We must also ensure this is not a private, hidden issue only handled by what is likely an isolated family unit. Suicidality is not a topic many can manage or handle. It's scary and messy, but the consequences are worse: we lose the lives of people we love. I don't want anyone to wake up to the body of a loved one on a bathroom floor having attempted suicide.

We must not only pass this law but ensure that we are a community that has space for people who struggle, who cannot manage to cope or regulate their emotions. While we are neutralizing a potential threat with the removal of a gun we must remember this person may be suffering and if they are thinking of violent action they probably need kindness and community more than ever. Those involved in the process must be specially trained as families need gentleness. Don't let this be another way we pathologize or other the people in our community suffering from mental illness. Let this be a way we support them.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Marie Follayttar South Portland, ME 4/5/24