

Judi Richardson
South Portland
LD 2283

Thank you members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me to submit testimony in favor of LD 2283 An act to Enact the Crisis Intervention Order to Protect the Safety of the Public. I thank Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross for presenting this bill in an effort to do something proactive to prevent gun violence and save lives.

I am Judi Richardson from South Portland. I come from a western Maine family that has long enjoyed hunting. My husband, Wayne, is a life-long Maine hunter and we are responsible gun owners. I am no stranger to the issue of gun violence in Maine. My 25 year-old daughter, Darien was shot in her own Portland home while sleeping. Darien's violent home invasion and homicide are still unsolved to this day, in part due to Maine's weak gun laws. I advocate to keep others from enduring the pain and suffering Darien experienced and the all consuming pain I have felt since her death. I will tell you that it is a pain like no other. It doesn't go away and doesn't get better. I truly hope you never experience such pain. I have been advocating for better gun laws in Maine for 13 years. There are many things we can do to prevent gun violence and this bill is one of them. Maine needs a true extreme risk protection order and this bill contains the legal elements that will save lives in Maine, preventing suicides and other preventable gun violence tragedies.

In all the years I have been sharing my daughter's pain, it has only felt to me that she didn't matter, that we as a Maine family don't matter after all it's just one young woman, just one family. Even last spring after the Bowdoin mass shooting, my advocacy and pleas went unheard by the majority of our lawmakers. Then, October further exposed the terrible weaknesses in Maine's laws and practices that are supposed to protect us. I have provided testimony for over 13 years that Maine's gun laws and current risk protection orders are too weak and it hurts me to my core that it took a horrific mass murder in Maine to prompt some people to action.

However, let's be clear that this was not Maine's first or second mass shooting. Whether it was a crime barely covered by the media or a suicide by someone in a moment of despair or domestic violence that escalates to murder their spouse and children - each shooting is a tragedy that calls out for action. Every shooting is the most devastating shooting for the victim, their families and a community that loves them.

Despite my efforts and the efforts of many we have only continued to weaken our gun laws in Maine. Often because lawmakers listen to the rhetoric that we already have laws in place, that these laws will only affect law abiding citizens and we need to get rid of gun free zones. True responsible gun owners like myself have nothing to fear from gun safety legislation. Responsible gun owners like me adhere to safe gun handling, practices and storage as do many if not most Maine gun owners. Responsible gun owners want gun safety laws to protect them. This bill is not intended to take guns away from responsible gun owners. This bill is about preventing gun tragedies and saving lives.

Maine has a high rate of domestic violence and suicide and a gun in those situations makes the situation much more dangerous and even lethal. Maine has a high rate of gun ownership and our weak laws continue to leave Mainers vulnerable to gun related tragedies, like we have experienced. Maine is living with the consequences of the gun lobby dictating our gun safety legislation. Guns are designed to be lethal, that's their purpose as any experienced hunter knows. I also know how lethal guns are. Responsible gun ownership and gun violence prevention are not incompatible.

When we know better, we do better - at least we should. Last year this body of lawmakers enacted a bill that we have to clear snow from our cars. To me that seems like something you shouldn't have to legislate. As a responsible car owner it is only common sense to clear the snow and prevent harm to other drivers. But that's what safety laws are for - to keep us all safe.

As a gun owner I believe in safety first. I am in support of LD 2283 and believe this is a great tool for family members and law enforcement to have. When a person is in crisis and considering suicide, family members are often the first to see the warning signs. If needed in a situation when a person is deemed a danger to themselves or others and there is enough evidence for a judge to decide to temporarily remove firearms from that person. Temporarily removing access to firearms using extreme risk protection orders has been shown to decrease suicide rates. Once the person gets the help they need and is no longer deemed a threat the firearms are returned to them.

This bill is about saving lives and keeping the community safe. I look to you lawmakers, for enacting gun safety legislation and we need to take action now. We are already much too late. You have the responsibility to take the steps to make Maine citizens safer. I strongly urge you to vote to pass LD 2283.

Thank you.

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