



Committee On Criminal Justice and Public Safety  
Testimony in Opposition to L.D. 486, *An Act to Remove the Duty of an Individual Exercising  
Self-defense to Safely Retreat or Abstain from Performing Certain Acts upon Demand*  
By Heide Lester on behalf of EqualityMaine

March 17, 2025

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Committee On Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Heide Lester, and I am the Deputy Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. We oppose L.D. 486 as it would encourage the escalation of violence and would likely prompt an increase in firearm homicides and injuries as has occurred in other states. For example, the implementation of Florida's Stand Your Ground law was associated with a 32% increase in firearm homicide rates and a 24% increase in overall homicide rates.<sup>1</sup>

LGBTQ+ people are more than two times as likely to be victims of gun violence than their straight and cisgender peers.<sup>2</sup> Since 2013, nearly two-thirds of fatal violence toward transgender and gender-expansive people involved a gun; the majority of those victims were black women under the age of 30.<sup>3</sup> The combination of a lack of adequate laws to prevent gun violence and animosity towards the LGBTQ+ community has already led to the loss of lives as well as immense harm and trauma caused by violence – and encouraging people to shoot first and ask questions later would undoubtedly worsen the current crisis.

People with a legitimate reason to defend themselves are already fully protected under Maine's self-defense law. But by prohibiting law enforcement, prosecutors, and juries from considering whether a person could have merely walked away from a conflict when determining whether it was reasonable for the person to use deadly force, this legislation would incite violence particularly against people of color and LGBTQ+ people.

We urge you to vote "Ought Not To Pass" on L.D. 486. This bill seeks to justify a person's use of force and distorts the purpose of self-defense. And in the words of Southern Poverty Law Center President and Chief Executive Officer Margaret Huang, Stand Your Ground laws "have allowed murderers to walk away and face absolutely no consequences for their actions. They have robbed families of their loved ones, needlessly divided communities along racial lines, emboldened racists, and exacerbated the racial and gender bias in our justice system."<sup>4</sup>

Thank you,

Heide Lester (they/them)

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<sup>1</sup> Humphreys DK, Gasparrini A, Wiebe DJ. "Evaluating the Impact of Florida's "Stand Your Ground" Self-defense Law on Homicide and Suicide by Firearm." JAMA, [jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2582988](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2582988)

<sup>2</sup> "Facts and Statistics About the Impact of Gun Violence on LGBTQ+ People." Sandy Hook Promise, 18 Oct. 2024, [sandyhookpromise.org/blog/news/facts-and-statistics-about-the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-lgbtq-people/](https://sandyhookpromise.org/blog/news/facts-and-statistics-about-the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-lgbtq-people/)

<sup>3</sup> "Gun Violence Prevention." Human Rights Campaign, [www.hrc.org/resources/gun-violence-prevention](https://www.hrc.org/resources/gun-violence-prevention).

<sup>4</sup> "NEW REPORT: Giffords Law Center and SPLC Action Fund Release New Analysis on How 'Stand Your Ground' Laws Fuel Racist, Lethal Violence." GIFFORDS, 5 Aug. 2020, [giffords.org/press-release/2020/07/stand-your-ground-report/](https://giffords.org/press-release/2020/07/stand-your-ground-report/).