

Dane Courtois
Hiram
LD 953

Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

As a staunch advocate for the Second Amendment and a committed Mainer, I write to strongly oppose LD 953, which seeks to change the definition of "machine gun" in the Maine Criminal Code. This bill represents an overreach that threatens the rights of law-abiding gun owners, muddies clear legal standards, and disregards the reality that an armed populace strengthens, rather than endangers, our state's safety.

Maine has a proud tradition of firearm ownership, rooted in our rural way of life—hunters stalking deer in Piscataquis County, sport shooters honing skills in York, and families defending homesteads in Waldo. Since 2015, our constitutional carry law has affirmed that Mainers can responsibly exercise their Second Amendment rights without excessive government interference. LD 953 undermines this trust by altering the definition of "machine gun," likely expanding it to include firearms or accessories—like rapid-fire triggers or modified semi-automatics—that are legally owned and safely used by countless citizens. Without seeing the exact wording, I can only assume it follows a national trend of vague, broad redefinitions that ensnare lawful owners rather than target criminals.

This change would sow confusion and fear. A farmer in Aroostook with a modified rifle for predator control or a competitor at a Scarborough shooting range could suddenly find their legal property reclassified as a "machine gun," facing felony charges for what was lawful yesterday. Maine's gun laws work because they're clear and fair—LD 953 risks turning honest folks into lawbreakers overnight, while doing little to address actual crime. Our sheriffs, already stretched thin patrolling vast counties like Franklin or Somerset, don't need the headache of enforcing ambiguous new rules against compliant citizens.

More importantly, this bill ignores how armed Mainers make us safer. The principle is simple: when law-abiding people have the tools to defend themselves, criminals think twice. Whether it's a concealed carrier in a Portland parking lot or a homeowner in Rumford with a rapid-fire-capable firearm, an armed presence deters violence. States like Texas and Idaho, with permissive laws on firearm modifications, show no correlation between legal ownership of such devices and increased crime—rather, their citizens can respond swiftly to threats. In Maine, where drug-related break-ins plague towns like Sanford and response times lag in the North Woods, law-abiding gun owners with advanced tools are a first line of defense, not a problem to be regulated away.

LD 953's proponents may point to rare, high-profile incidents elsewhere, but Maine's reality is different. Our violent crime rate remains low, and our legal gun owners—many of whom own specialized firearms—aren't driving what issues we do have. In 2023, Maine saw more deaths from overdoses than gunfire, yet here we are targeting tools used responsibly by hunters, hobbyists, and protectors. This bill diverts focus from real challenges—like the opioid crisis or underfunded police—to punish the law-abiding under a guise of safety that lacks evidence.

I urge the Judiciary Committee to reject LD 953. Maine thrives when we trust our people with their constitutional rights, not when we chip away at them with unclear, unnecessary laws. Let's keep our state a bastion of liberty, where responsible gun ownership—including the freedom to own and modify firearms—bolsters our security. Thank you for your service and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dane Courtois