

March 26, 2025

Testimony in Support of LD 677, LD 1109 and LD 1126

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Joel Russ. I live in South Bristol. I spent my professional life in community-based non-profit organizations, from Historic Preservation to Chambers of Commerce, to Science & Technology, to organizations serving the interests of at-risk youth. As a result of those work experiences, I care deeply about the health, welfare and safety of all of our citizens.

I would like to complement the members of the Judiciary Committee for your attention and patience as you consider a wide range of proposed gun-related legislation. It must seem over whelming at times, but this is critically important work, which I hope will lead to decisions that improve the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Maine through the adoption and implementation of sensible gun safety laws and practices.

I grew up in a Maine home in which guns were present; shot guns and 30/30's. I hunted with my older brother; mostly without success. I also took gun safety courses as a 12 year old camper at a Maine Conservation Camp in Winthrop, Maine.

I served for four and half years in the US Army from 1966 to 19781. During basic training at Ft. Dix, advanced infantry training in Anniston, Alabama and 6 months at Infantry Officers Candidate School, Fort Benning, Georgia, I personally experienced the destructive power of rapid-fire weapons. Since then, I have always considered them to be instruments of war, when necessary, not to be used by civilians in our communities.

I currently serve on the Board of Directors of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition.

But more importantly, I am a father of two and a grandfather of three. The grandchildren ages range from 19 to 23, the age group in which guns are tragically the most common cause of death.

I'm often asked why I have become committed to gun safety. There are many reasons:

- First, as a citizen of the United States, I have become increasingly shocked by the number and severity of mass shootings in my country: Uvalde, Sandy Hook, Columbine, Las Vegas and others; and of course most recently, the tragic mass shooting in Lewiston. We can never forget that event and how we, as citizens of Maine, felt on that day.
- Second, I was reminded of the threat to our young people, when my granddaughter, Maddy, in her valedictory address to her fellow graduates at

Lincoln Academy in Newcastle three years ago, in a bold and unvarnished statement of the realities of the world her classmates would be entering said: “My fellow students, guns are the leading cause of death in our age group”. She went on to talk about the threat to reproductive rights, attacks against marginalized people, and so forth.

Maddy was speaking an honest and hard truth to her friends and classmates. However, Maddy concluded her remarks on a positive note, by reminding them they can all do something about it; by being involved to effect change.

I know there are sensible solutions to the increasing incidences of gun violence, which respect second amendment rights and the long tradition of gun ownership in Maine, both of which I personally support. I also know, however, that those rights and traditions can be protected and preserved while increasing the safety of our children, our schools and our communities.

Therefore, I would encourage you to support the three bills that are before you today: LD 677, LD 1126 and LD 1109. I am obviously speaking in favor of these bills.

Thank you for your attention.