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Testimony in Opposition to LD 208, LD 1230 and LD 1062

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

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

I hope the work of this committee and the Legislature 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.

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 took gun safety courses as a 12-year old camper at the Maine Conservation Camp in Winthrop.

I served for four and half years in the US Army from 1966 to 1978. During basic training at Ft. Dix, advanced infantry training in Alabama and 6 months at Infantry Officers Candidate School, Fort Benning, Georgia, I personally experienced the destructive power of weapons. It also raised my consciousness about the need for a comprehensive set of gun safety laws and practices.

I am the father of two and the 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 and I care deeply about their safety.

There are many reasons I'm committed to gun safety:

- 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 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”.

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, such as a 72-hour waiting period and expanded background checks, which respect second amendment rights and the long tradition of gun ownership in Maine. I also know that those rights and traditions can be protected and preserved while increasing the safety of our children, our schools and our communities.

I would encourage you to oppose LD 208, LD 1230 and LD 1062.

There is ample evidence from reliable sources and research that a reasonable waiting period can both reduce firearm suicides and gun-related homicides.

There is ample evidence that expanded background checks for sales of guns by unlicensed sellers (private on-line sales and gun show sales) can reduce the number of people who should not have access to guns, such as people who are subject to domestic violence convictions.

To me, these laws just make sense.

Before repealing these enacted statutes, I would encourage this committee and the Legislature to give those laws a reasonable period of time to demonstrate their effectiveness in making our communities safer.

Thank you for your attention.

Joel B. Russ