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LD 1062

As a resident of Maine for 37 years, a pastor in several Maine churches since 1995, a member of the Maine Council of Churches Public Policy Committee, a former Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, and, mostly importantly, as a parent and grandparent who has raised children in Maine, I strongly oppose LD 1062 and LD 1030.

From a moral point of view, it strikes me as deeply regrettable that -- knowingly or unconsciously -- we so often apply the "risk-benefit analysis" approach that became prevalent in public policy-making and legal circles over the last 50 or so years to the consideration of policies that touch on matters of life and death. In my own Unitarian Universalist and Christian traditions, every other world religion with which I'm familiar, and in humanist philosophy, the idea that every human life is of infinite value is a core belief and central ethical concern. Morally, a human life cannot be put on one side of a scale and money or convenience or traditions on the other. The value of one human life lost to suicide, accident or violent crime cannot truly be measured. Anyone who hasn't experienced such a loss of a loved one needs only ask a grieving family member to see it up close and get a sense of the ripple effects of such tragedies. You have heard testimony today from more than one such grieving person.

The infinite value and worth of every human being is also one of the central ethical principles on which our own Constitution and Bill of Rights rest, although we are still groping our way toward fulfillment of that foundational ideal. We secure self-government and the rights of individuals because human life itself is an intrinsic, or as many people of faith would say, a Divine, truth.

Rather than balancing a proposed policy over against economic effects on small business or big corporations, or the inconvenience to some citizens or the fact that old traditions will need to change in a modern, more interconnected world, we need to put the value of human life at the center and ask whether a particular proposal will detract from or enhance protection of that value. That value will, in some circumstances, demand we put reasonable limits on Constitutional rights that we otherwise hold sacrosanct. Like other rights, even including free speech, ethics, morality, public safety demand that 2d Amendment rights cannot be unbounded and absolute.

In short, gun safety is a public health and safety issue, and a moral issue, not a fight between people who don't want anything to do with firearms and others who want to buy and sell, own and use them -- most of them law-abiding and well-meaning. But no amount of economic harm or the inconvenience of reasonable, common sense limits on a citizen's right to own a dangerous weapon can make up for the infinite loss of the infinite value of a human life that might have been saved.

When proposed public policies such as 72 hour waiting periods and background checks on advertised gun sales (and incentives to do background checks on unadvertised gun sales), which self-evidently will save human lives, are "weighed" against other concerns, such as their effect on small businesses, gun-buyers' convenience, or large corporations or powerful lobbies such as the NRA, something has gone seriously wrong. A "risk-benefit" approach will lead us down the wrong road in this case. Our methods of reaching ethical decisions and public policy must always rest on principles that will promote the common good and protect the infinite worth and value of human life.

We have a chance to do something that can reduce the likelihood of accidental and suicidal and domestic violence deaths by firearm. Given the infinite value of every human life that would be saved (even if a policy such as this cannot be perfectly enforced in every single case) why would we choose to do any less?

Thank you for considering my views.