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LD 1120

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 support LD 1120.

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 human 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 need 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 the infinite value of 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 Constitutional rights, from a moral point of view (and in line with much legal precedent in many areas of public policy), Second Amendment rights cannot be unbounded and absolute.

In short, gun safety is a public health and safety issue, and a moral issue, not a situation calling for a risk-benefit policy analysis. No amount of economic harm nor the inconvenience of reasonable, common sense limits being placed 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.

Proposed public policies such as secure storage of dangerous weapons will self-evidently save human lives. No rational argument could deny this with a straight face. Even if no policy can prevent every tragedy or crime, we have a chance to 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 it is only a single one, why would we choose to do any less?

Thank you for considering my views.