

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed members of the committee,

My name is Cathy Harris and I live in Mechanic Falls, only ten miles from Lewiston. I am a grandmother to three beautiful babies, ages three and under and I am a retired elementary school teacher.

I am writing in support of LD 1378, An Act to Protect Maine Communities by Enacting the Extreme Risk Protection Order Act.

During my years as a teacher, with up to twenty kindergarten students under my care, my biggest fear was an active shooter coming into the school. That fear was felt by our entire staff. The Sandy Hook tragedy filled us with horror. We had a staff meeting that afternoon where we cried and hugged each other. We started to implement active shooter drills so that we could be as prepared as possible knowing that we could never be fully prepared. The possibility that something like that could happen in our school hung over us like a dark cloud.

On October 25th, 2023, while discussing plans for our anniversary, my husband who is part of the Maine Emergency Response Team received a phone call that filled us with alarm. There was an active shooter in Lewiston, with multiple casualties. My husband had to go. The very thing I dreaded most was happening in our community, only ten miles from our door. My heart ached for the victims and their families.

It is a sad fact that firearms are the leading cause of death for American children and teens. And unfortunately, as we all saw, that state of Maine is not immune to gun violence. Suicide is the leading cause of gun deaths in Maine, particularly among men.

ERPOs allow families and law enforcement to petition the court to temporarily restrict someone's access to a dangerous weapon while they are in crisis. If someone is saying they plan to harm themselves or others with a firearm, family members need to be able to do something to prevent a tragedy. Our current laws are ineffective and failed to prevent the shooting in Lewiston. The report by the Lewiston Commission noted that Maine's "yellow flag law" is cumbersome, weak, ineffective and failed despite multiple people close to the shooter reporting that he was in crisis.

ERPO's in other states have been used effectively to disarm people who threatened mass shooting including school shootings. They also have been proven to reduce suicides.

We simply **MUST** do all that we can to protect our communities and prevent another tragedy like the one in Lewiston in 2023. We **MUST** do all that we can to protect our innocent children and prevent an individual in crisis from entering our schools with a firearm. We **MUST** do all we can to reduce suicides. And this is why I wholeheartedly support this bill.

Thank you,

Cathy Harris