

Testimony in Support of LD 759
Presented by Cushman Anthony
On behalf of the Maine Council of Churches
April 21, 2021

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety: My name is Cushman Anthony. I am a Quaker and I live in Yarmouth. I am a retired lawyer and mediator. I was a member of the House of Representatives from 1986 to 1992, and was House Chair of the Select Committee on Corrections during the 115th Legislature.

I am speaking today on behalf of the Maine Council of Churches, the leading organization of Protestant Christian churches in our state. We represent seven denominations statewide which include 437 churches with a total membership of more than 55,000 members. Our Prayer for Justice states that we are working toward "...a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love."

We support passage of LD 759 which makes it a crime of endangering the welfare of a child if you leave a loaded firearm at a place where a child is likely to gain access to it. All **responsible** gun owners keep their firearms unloaded and under lock and key, and the ammunition for those guns in a separate secure location.

Research shows that our country is experiencing an increase of unintentional shootings by children of themselves or others. In 2020 the number of these incidents increased by a whopping 20 percent. Up to 80 percent of the children who engaged in gun violence on school grounds obtained their guns from their own home, a relative's home, or from friends. Passage of this bill should reduce the likelihood of these incidents, without in any way interfering with Second Amendment rights of gun owners.

Furthermore, this law should reduce the number of child suicides. According to the CDC, in Maine 80 percent of all gun deaths among children under 18 years old are suicides. A study by researchers at Johns Hopkins found that states with secure storage laws that hold gun owners accountable for child access experienced an 11 percent decrease in firearm suicide rates among older teens. Passage of this law will not guarantee the safety of children, but it should significantly reduce the number of incidents of this type.

We urge passage of this sensible firearm management law.