

April 3, 2023

1230 Kenduskeag Ave, Bangor

Good morning, Senator Beebe-Center and Representative Salisbury. My name is Geoff Gratwick. I am a retired doctor, live in Bangor, and represented Bangor from 2012 to 2020 in the Senate where I variously chaired HHS and HCIFS. I am a member of The Gun Safety Coalition and here to speak in favor of LD 60 and LD 168.

I am both comfortable with guns and terrified by them.

I have two stories.

First, about being comfortable: Guns have always been a part of my life. I was well instructed in firearm safety when I was young. I had a 22 and other guns – and still have several. I taught riflery at a summer camp. I was a fierce instructor, a stickler for safety. Kids lost the chance to shoot for the whole season if they did not follow the rules. In college I bought a pistol at a secondhand store on Vinalhaven; the proprietor was very careful even back then about going over my experience and background. I bought a shotgun when I went sailing in the Caribbean on my honeymoon. My bride and I slept with it beside us in the bow bunk. My point: I am not anti-gun.

Then terror: I did some of my medical training at Harlem Hospital in NYC. This was in the mid '70s. Drugs, crime, poverty, and racism were all explosively mixed together. The ER was a war zone on Saturday night. One Saturday on a hot summer night I was the senior doc in the ER when all hell broke loose. Screaming ambulances brought in 3 cops who had been ambushed and killed with large caliber weapons, two with gun shot wounds to the head and one to the chest. Young guys, 20s and 30s, my age, I still have the picture in my mind's eye of an absent half skull, brains all over, on the towels, on my hands, brains. When I have bad dreams, perhaps every several months, 60 years later, these guys are still there, etched in my brain. My point: I know what guns can do to people. I have reason for my terror. It is long lasting and deep seated.

To step back: We live in a society that imposes conditions and limits of many of our activities. Cars, like guns, are very powerful. They help us but also can kill us. We require a level of maturity and a license to be able to use them. You cannot buy alcohol before a certain age. Same for cigarettes. Same reasons. Same for most medicines. When I was practicing medicine, I had the power to give my patients powerful medicines but there were restraints on my actions. I too needed a license, a lot of training, time.

I strongly urge you to pass LD 60 and LD 168. These bills do not deprive any reasonable person of the right to purchase, own and use a gun for legitimate purposes. These laws may save a life. These laws have no realistic downsides.

Thank you.