



Testimony before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee in support of
L.D. 168 "An Act Regarding Criminal Background Checks for the Sale, Transfer or Exchange of Firearms"
April 3, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Tara Williams and I am a resident of Cumberland and a mom of two children. I am also a volunteer with the Maine chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, working towards public safety measures that can protect people from gun violence.

I support LD 168, because it fills a gap in Maine's laws. Under federal law, background checks are only required if a person is purchasing a gun from a federally licensed firearm dealer. This has left a loophole, allowing individuals to buy guns from unlicensed sellers—including sellers they meet online or at gun shows—with no background check and no questions asked. This gap in our laws makes it far too easy for people with dangerous histories—who would fail a background check if they tried to purchase a firearm from a licensed gun dealer—to get their hands on a gun by purchasing it from an unlicensed seller.

This matters. This matters in Maine. The types of gun violence and gun deaths we experience here will be reduced by a background check law. When I read our state data (some of which is listed here in my written testimony), I am struck by how important it is for us to address rates of gun death caused by homicide and suicide.

- The majority of suicides (55%) and homicides (63%) in Maine involve a gun.
- The rate of gun deaths has increased 41% from 2012 to 2021 in Maine, compared to a 39% increase nationwide. This means that in 2021 there were 48 more gun deaths than in 2012.
- In Maine, the rate of gun suicide increased 45% from 2012 to 2021, compared to a 19% change nationwide.
- The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk that the woman will be killed fivefold.
- Access to a gun doubles the risk of death by homicide and triples the risk of death by suicide.

I want to look at this data next year and see that more Mainers lived, because we did what we could to support gun safety. States that go beyond federal law and require background checks for unlicensed sales are associated with a 10 percent lower homicide rate, as well as lower rates of firearm suicide and gun trafficking. Maine is not yet one of those states.

I haven't been directly impacted by gun violence. Yet I feel its indirect impacts all the time. As a mom and former elementary school teacher, I feel the impact of gun violence in schools the most. I have this small pit of fear that sits in the background, usually quiet, but sometimes on high alert, like when I hear sirens go down route 1 in the middle of a school day...scared that the next news story will be about my kid's school. Over 10 years ago, Sandy Hook left me in a puddle, crying on the couch, pregnant with my second child, my toddler napping as I watched the news. After Uvalde, I mostly felt anger, resentment, frustration at how many years have gone by without enough focus on gun safety. After Nashville last week, I feel a type of despair that is hard to describe. How can we be a country that cares so little about our children? How are these policies not already in place? I can't believe that I live in a country where I can name multiple mass shootings where children under 10 were killed.

This is why I am here today. You have the power to help create the change we need. This bill. These types of policy changes are common-sense, bipartisan, and most importantly, proven to work. I don't want to hear about one more drill in my kids' classrooms; one more time where they are trained to barricade doors and throw things to distract a shooter; one more school expense for active shooter training, bullet proof windows, and extra secure locks on doors. My children need to go to a school, not a bunker. They need you to enact these policy changes that make their community and our state a safer place to live.

Please vote ought to pass on L.D. 168 for all of Maine's children.

Data Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using four years of the most recent available data: 2018 to 2021.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. Rates are age-adjusted. A percentage change was developed using 2012 and 2021 data.

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Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study," *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 7 (July 2003): 1089-97, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.93.7.1089>.

Michael Siegel and Claire Boine, *What Are the Most Effective Policies in Reducing Gun Homicides?* Albany, NY: Rockefeller Institute of Government, March 2019. <https://bit.ly/2YPaz7P>.

Eric W. Fleegler, Lois K. Lee, Michael C. Monuteaux, David Hemenway, and Rebekah Mannix, "Firearm Legislation and Firearm-Related Fatalities in the United States," *JAMA Internal Medicine* 173, no. 9 (2013): 732-740.

Daniel W. Webster, Jon S. Vernick, and Maria T. Bulzacchelli, "Effects of State-Level Firearm Seller Accountability Policies on Firearm Trafficking," *Journal of Urban Health* 86, no. 4 (July 2009): 525-537. Federal law bars felons from having firearms but does not bar misdemeanors outside the domestic violence context. Daniel W. Webster, Jon S. Vernick, Emma Beth McGinty, and Ted Alcorn, "Preventing the Diversion of Guns to Criminals Through Effective Firearm Sales Laws," in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis*, 109-121. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.