

Testimony of Tara Williams
before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee
in opposition to
LD 52 An Act to Allow Certain School Employees to Carry Firearms on School Property,
LD 518 An Act to Allow Armed Security in Schools,
LD 1326 An Act to Increase School Security Through Design and Protocol, and
LD 1557 An Act to Increase and Enhance School Safety by Allowing Individuals with Concealed
Carry Permits to Possess Handguns on School Property
April 26, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Tara Williams, and I am a resident of Cumberland. I am a mom of two children in Maine public schools, one in elementary school and one in middle school. I oppose LD 52, LD 518, LD 1326, and LD 1557 with every fiber of my being, as a mom and as an educator.

I taught for many years, working in child care programs and elementary schools in Maine and in Washington, DC. I have been in many lockdown drills as a teacher and one particularly difficult day when it was not a drill. My assistant teacher and I cared for our class of 4-year-old students for several hours of lockdown while an active shooter was in the neighborhood. We were together in the classroom into the late afternoon and early evening, trying to shield the preschoolers from the reality of the moment and help them enjoy the “special” long day we were having, reading books, drawing, and finding ways to pass the time quietly with all the blinds drawn and the doors and windows locked. There is never a situation, even that scary lockdown day, where I would have felt safer with a gun in our school.

The presence of guns in schools raises the risk of both intentional and unintentional shootings. Safe schools are the heart of our Maine communities. They are places for books and blocks and backpacks, not weapons. Some states have made the mistake of passing legislation like the proposals in the bills before you today:

- There have been numerous incidents where guns carried into schools were misplaced — guns left in bathrooms, locker rooms, sporting events, even an incident where a gun fell out while a teacher did a backflip.
- There are also multiple incidents where guns were stolen from teachers by students, or cases where guns were misplaced and later found in the hands of students.¹⁶
- There have been several incidents of firearm suicides by faculty or staff at schools, as well as unintentional incidents by both school resource officers and teachers who accidentally discharged their firearms.

Gun safety legislation is rather misplaced in this committee and should be addressed in the Committee for Criminal Justice and Public Safety, with background checks, 72-hour waiting periods, extreme risk laws, and other evidenced-based policies that protect our children and our schools. Rather than try to pass these dangerous bills, please focus on real school-based solutions in this committee such as investing in mental health professionals and resources, community education and outreach led by schools that encourages the secure storage of firearms, and trauma-informed emergency planning with administrators and teachers.