

April 26, 2023

Joan Newkirk

Testimony in Opposition to LD 52

An Act to Allow Certain School Employees to Carry Firearms on School Property

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education Committee, my name is Joan Newkirk. I am a resident of Bath, a retired teacher, and a grandmother. I am opposed to LD 518, LD 52 and LD 1557, and I am writing today to address LD 52.

During my 32 years as a teacher of elementary-aged children, I was fortunate not to have experienced gun violence in my school. However, the threat of gun violence was often in my thoughts. With the heartbreaking news of each school shooting in our country, I would dread returning to work the next day. I wondered how I would talk to my students about the latest shooting. How could I reassure them that the adults would keep them safe?

Certainly, arming teachers is not the answer. When surveyed, the vast majority of teachers indicated that they do not want to carry a gun in school. Studies have shown that guns in schools are dangerous, they can be improperly used or stored - resulting in dire consequences. It is unreasonable and unfair to expect a teacher to be able to react effectively amid a chaotic shooting situation.

I worry about the message we send to our children. Elementary teachers spend time every day supervising students while they have recess. Inevitably, when conflicts arise, we remind them to use their words, that sticks should not be used as weapons, and that we don't throw stones at classmates. Instead, we encourage students to find common ground, and settle their differences in reasonable ways. As adults, we can find alternative ways to deal with gun violence. We can agree on reasonable gun safety laws, and work towards providing a nurturing, peaceful environment for our students.

Our students have a right to a safe environment, without worrying about being caught in the crossfire. No child should be fearful of attending school and growing up in an environment where guns take priority over learning.

Please oppose LD 518, LD 52 and LD 1557. We can do better in protecting our kids by passing common-sense gun laws, which most people in Maine support. Laws that encourage safe storage of firearms, extensive background checks, and banning assault weapons are better alternatives that we owe to our children and grandchildren.