



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

In Opposition

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

LD 1557: An Act to Increase and Enhance School Safety by Allowing Individuals with Concealed Carry Permits to Possess Handguns on School Property

Grace Leavitt – President, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs

April 25, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I proudly serve as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher prep programs as well as many retired educators.

I am here to testify on behalf of MEA in the **strongest** of 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.

The basis for opposition to these bills is quite simple: The answer to too many guns is NOT more guns!

The headlines are horrific:

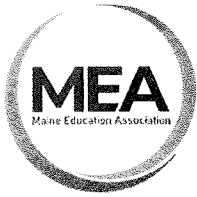
“74 people have been killed or injured by guns at American schools this year”¹

“More than 349,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine; There have been 377 school shootings since 1999”²

“Frequent shootings put US mass killings on a record pace”³

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They are horrific and frequent. And we must do more, much more, to diminish these numbers, these incidents, if not avoid them entirely. We all must, and can, do more to keep our students and educators—and our communities—safe.

But having guns in schools is simply not the answer. Arming school employees, as called for in LD 52, would very likely lead to headlines like this one: *"In confusion and chaos following a pulled alarm, student is shot in error by armed educator"* or *"Student manages to obtain educator's gun and kills two classmates"*. These are imaginary headlines—ones I hope to never be reading. But with all that educators are called upon to do throughout the day, not the least of which is teaching, scenarios like these could become real.

LD 518 would convert our schools from welcoming places to high security institutions. Many districts have school resource officers, but these officers, although in the views of some they do provide a sense of security, when they are appropriately trained they are meant to serve as additional supports for students, not 'armed guards'. And there are many who are opposed to having even SROs in schools at all. There are studies that show the trauma this can cause some students and even staff. Do we want our schools to have environments that welcome all students, or do we want schools where fear is instilled in all who approach the entrance each day?

LD 1557 will have everyone wondering, "Does that person have a concealed weapon?" Would we all be looking at one another with fear and/or suspicion, rather than having a sense of camaraderie and collaboration? And then there is the potential for an accident or the wrong person—a student—managing to get the individual's weapon.

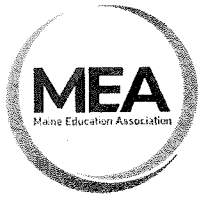
LD 1326 is perhaps the most heinous of all. Now it is the fault of the educator who perhaps left a door unlocked, whether knowingly to allow students to enter or unwittingly in the course of the busy day, if a tragedy should occur. As if such an incident would not already destroy the educator with the sense that they may have in any way contributed to a tragic incident, now they would be criminally and civilly liable as well. This would not apply to a student who opens a door, even props it open for their friends who have arrived late, despite rules dictating otherwise—just the educator who perhaps left a door ajar while on recess duty or the like.

If you want to increase the already critical shortages of educators, enact any of these proposed bills. You will see many more leaving the profession, and even fewer considering entering it. The worry of a possible tragedy, the concern for safety—these are already enough cause for some to leave and for some to turn to other careers.

The editorial in this past Sunday's paper, *"Our View: A school with guns in it is not a safe school"*⁴, had 149 comments posted by that afternoon—and they were overwhelmingly, nearly every one, in line with the opinion expressed in the editorial.

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MEA Resolutions, the positions of the MEA as adopted at our annual Representative Assembly, call for schools to have a 'weapon free environment' and that "At no time should parents, students, educators, or others be encouraged, permitted or required to carry firearms on school property".

MEA urges you all to oppose the bills before you today: LD 52, LD 518, LD 1326, and LD 1557 and instead encourages you to support LD 22, LD 60, LD 168, and LD 582 which came before the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety earlier this month as these bills would put in place measures that promote better gun safety in our state, and may, just may prevent the kinds of headlines we see all too often.

¹<https://www.npr.org/2023/03/29/1166651590/nashville-school-shootings-gun-violence-children-cause-death-2023>

²<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/school-shootings-database/>

³abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/week-nightmare-us-mass-killings-record-pace-98752414

⁴ <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/04/23/our-view-a-school-with-guns-in-it-is-not-a-safe-school/>

Some additional information:

There have been at least 2,654 mass shootings since Sandy Hook, with at least 2,908 killed and 11,088 wounded. ([vox.com](https://www.vox.com))

Gun violence is a public health crisis. More children under the age of 19 die from firearms than any other cause. ([New England Journal of Medicine](https://www.newenglandjournalofmedicine.com))

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