

Maine Chapter

INCORPORATED IN MAINE

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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April 25, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Joe Anderson. I am a resident of Portland, a hospital-based pediatrician, and I serve on the board of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am writing today to express our strong opposition to three pieces of legislation that would increase the presence of guns in schools:

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

We ask that you vote Ought Not to Pass on these three bills.

As individuals in positions of leadership or influence in our communities, I'm sure you've been asked the question "What keeps you up at night?" As a pediatrician, that issue is gun violence. I have cared for children and teenagers who have suffered life-altering injuries or death as a result of firearms far more often than I care to admit. Their injuries are seared into my memory and serve as a constant reminder of how unbelievably easy it is in this country for children and teenagers to have their lives interrupted by firearms, made possible by weak or misguided policies regarding gun safety.

Gun violence is a public health crisis in the US, where deaths by firearms have outpaced motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death for children and teens aged 1 to 19 in the United States.¹ There are significant opportunities to improve these statistics with gun safety policies that are supported by a majority of Americans, and in many cases by most gun owners as well.

These three bills are not what we would consider common-sense gun safety policies, and in fact, may make schools a more dangerous place for children. The Giffords Law Center¹ compiled a comprehensive list of nearly 100 publicly reported incidents of mishandled guns at schools in the last five years alone. These include incidents where a gun was left accessible to children, a firearm was discharged unintentionally, or a gun was used in times of personal stress or conflict, all taking place in school. In many of these incidents, trained school resource officers and security guards mishandled or unintentionally fired their weapons – incidents more likely to occur if teachers or other adults without specific law enforcement training are allowed to bring firearms to schools. Time and time again, research has shown that the simple presence of a gun in the house increases the risk for firearm-related injury or death.^{2,3} It's hard to imagine that the outcomes would be any different in the school environment.

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School has become an anxiety-filled environment for many students these days, given the prevalence of school shootings and the subsequent implementation of enhanced security practices and active shooter drills. We should focus on doing whatever we can to 1) keep kids safe while they are in school, and 2) ensure that the school environment is engineered to foster a successful learning environment. Adding more guns into the school setting has not been proven to support the first goal, and would likely add to the stress and anxiety many students experience. There is a strong public opposition to arming teachers: 7 out of 10 teenagers, 8 out of 10 teachers, and 7 out of 10 parents oppose this approach.¹

The American Academy of Pediatrics is committed to protecting children from firearm-related injury and violence. We support specific, research-supported measures to reduce the destructive effects of guns in the lives of children and adolescents, including universal background checks, increasing age limits for the purchase of certain types of firearms, instituting waiting periods for firearm purchases, establishing child access prevention laws and extreme risk protection order laws, and introducing bans on semiautomatic military-style weapons and high-capacity magazines. Legislation such as LD 52, LD 518, and LD 1557 are not supported by research, data, or public opinion, and we urge you to vote ought not to pass on these three bills.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Anderson DO".

Joe Anderson, DO, FAAP

Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee

Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

¹ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. Every Incident of Mishandled Guns in Schools. (<https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/every-incident-of-mishandled-guns-in-schools/>). April 7, 2023. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Wonder. 2021 (<https://wonder.cdc.gov/>).

² Linda L. Dahlberg, Robin M. Ikeda, Marcie-jo Kresnow, Guns in the Home and Risk of a Violent Death in the Home: Findings from a National Study. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Volume 160, Issue 10, 15 November 2004, Pages 929–936, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwh309>

³ Dahlberg LL. Guns in the home and risk of a violent death in the home: findings from a national study. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 2004;160(10):929-936, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aan8179>