

Peggy McGehee
Falmouth, Maine

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1557 on allowing individuals with concealed weapons permits to possess handguns on school property

Dear Chairs Rafferty, Brennan and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

I am Peggy McGehee, a resident, former school board member and town councilor of the Town of Falmouth. I oppose L.D. 1557, as someone who believes fervently that we need to protect our students, and who is part of a gun-owning, public service family.

This bill would allow anyone, 18 years of age or older, with a Maine concealed handgun permit, to conceal carry their handgun in Maine's schools including well over 10,000 18-year-old seniors, their 18-year-old friends, their parents, relatives, teachers, security guards, lunch staff, contractors, landscapers, political activists, protesters—anyone.

Maine's voluntary concealed firearm permit law, 25 M.R.S.A. §2003, is a very low-bar permit law. Unlike other states, its gun safety knowledge requirement has no requirement for hours of either classroom or fire range training, and no written exam, and no showing of competence. The permit application screens only for those with criminal records or applicable restraining orders, or self-admitted dangerous mental disorders or drug addiction. Without such low-bar disqualifiers, the State must issue the applicant the permit.

The shooting on the Colby College campus in March is instructive — where a guest at a campus wide party pulled out his concealed carry gun when he got in a fight and shot it twice—in a hallway packed with students. Allowing everyone with a permit to carry firearms in Maine's schools, risks similar incidents, from classrooms to athletic events to senior proms.

This bill is unlikely to save lives in an active shooter situation. When rampage shootings do occur, they are almost never stopped by armed civilians. An ABA 2019 Report found that in 160 shooter incidents, there was only one successful armed civilian intervention - by a U.S. Marine. There is a greater risk of injury from accidental shootings.

Indiscriminate numbers of persons carrying guns in schools will increase exponentially the risk that students will access and accidentally discharge them. In the 5 years previous to last July, there were nearly 100 such incidents, where guns were stolen from teachers by students, where guns were misplaced and later found in the hands of students, and where guns were intentionally or unintentionally discharged on school grounds. Some caused eye, leg, foot and neck injuries.

Arming schools this way will also undoubtedly expose schools to liability from shootings, by having allowed untrained and unsupervised persons to have guns on campus. It is doubtful this liability would even be insurable as such a gun carrying policy is so dangerous.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

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