

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

Senator Rafferty, Rep. Brennan and members of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on LD 1557. My name is Mary Orear, a resident of Rockport. I taught students grades 5 - 12 for 23 years and am strongly opposed to this statute. Allowing anyone aged 18 years or older, with a Maine concealed handgun permit, to conceal carry his or her handgun in public and approved private schools, colleges and universities, is a disastrous idea.

In the 24 years since the Columbine High School massacre, schools across the U.S. have devoted vast amounts of time and resources to keep guns OUT of schools; LD 1557 would allow them right back in. The proposed statute would increase the danger level and would result in students, faculty, staff, community members and essentially anyone on school property feeling less safe, all the time. Remember, this statute applies not only to the instructional day. These concealed handguns could be brought to ALL school-sponsored activities including athletic events, dances, adult ed evening programs, graduations, etc., by anyone.

Anxiety among students is already high. This past summer a senior high school graduate talked about standing the previous evening on the gym's risers, thinking it was the perfect situation for someone to pull out a handgun and open fire. Fearing graduation as a mass shooting opportunity isn't the thought we want running through a senior's mind, but it IS a window into the level of anxiety many students are struggling to deal with already, on a daily basis, even now when these concealed carry weapons are forbidden on school property. Can you imagine, should this statute be passed, how those anxieties would accelerate?

This proposed statute ignores current brain development research findings which reveal that impulse control is a major issue for those aged 18-20. Passing this statute would allow young people with reduced impulse control to legally possess handguns, in high schools, college campuses, and even in college dorms. Add that many young people are using drugs or alcohol, and the danger of this proposed statute greatly increases. Speaking as a teacher, I wouldn't accept a teaching position at any level in a state that allowed people 18 years of age and older to carry concealed handguns, and I don't believe I'm alone in that. Maine is already facing a teacher shortage, and this statute would likely make that worse.

A few questions to consider when you deliberate:

1. Who is clamoring for this bill and why?
2. What problem exists that this bill will solve?
3. What problems will this bill create?

From my perspective, this proposed statute is phenomenally misguided, solves no problem, and would create enormous ones, adding to already existing anxiety while producing a dangerous environment for everyone in Maine schools, colleges and universities, and anyone who sets foot on school properties at any time. I encourage you to oppose it.

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