

Opposition to Bill 551 Cathy Daphna Harris

Dear distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Cathy Harris and I am a retired school teacher as well as a parent and grandparent. I live in Mechanic Falls. I am speaking in opposition to Bill 551.

The reason why it is prohibited to discharge a gun in a school zone is to protect the public, specifically children. Children who may be on the playground during recess, children walking to and from school, children being dropped off or picked up in school parking lots, and children at soccer practice or participating in outdoor sporting events.

Schools are a hub of activity with concerts and sporting events going on well into the evenings. Many schools host open house, science fairs, and fund raisers after school hours and on the weekends. School playgrounds in most towns are used by the community and are available as a place where families can bring their children when school is not in session. Communities count on schools to be a safe place.

This bill puts children, parents and school staff in danger of being hit by a stray bullet. In Maine anyone can own a gun. They are not required to have a permit or have any safety training. I am sure no one on this committee wants a kindergarten age child to be shot while playing outside at recess, or a mother to be shot in her car after she has dropped off her children at school, or a member of the visiting soccer team to be hit by a bullet while participating in a sports tournament. Yet if this bill goes forward this is the kind of risk we would face. We need to keep school playgrounds, parking lots and athletic fields as safe as possible.

Last week at hearings regarding concealed weapons in schools or using teachers as armed security, I heard proponents speak passionately about how important it is that we protect our children in school. Now I am hearing that a gun owner's personal rights to fire his weapon at a perceived threat is more important than the safety of our school children. I can't help but notice the hypocrisy.

I urge you to keep our school zones safe and vote against this bill.

Thank you.