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**JACQUELINE SARTORIS, DISTRICT ATTORNEY, D2  
“An Act to Prohibit the Sale or Possession of Rapid-fire Modification Devices”  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety  
Public Hearing Date: May 8, 2023  
Testimony in Support of LD 1340**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Jacqueline Sartoris, I am the District Attorney for District 2, which includes Portland and so many diverse Cumberland County communities comprising a quarter of Maine’s total population. I am here to testify in support of LD 1340, “An Act to Prohibit the Sale or Possession of Rapid-fire Modification Devices”, because I see the way in which the unfettered access to guns, ammunition, and other equipment of war is harming our communities and making us far less safe by the day. The proposal to prohibit possession of equipment to accelerate the rate of fire of a semi-automatic firearm is simply common sense, but it is warranted given our nation’s history and now daily experience of gun violence.

A few weeks ago, the community of South Portland found themselves in the news, watching footage of a tactical team descending upon the home of a local student. Public reporting detailed that several weapons had been recovered, including high powered rifles. South Portland Police Chief Daniel Ahern was quoted as stating “We reduced any type of threat from the individual. We recovered a lot of evidence... that will stop any actions that he had planned... We want to ensure the public they are safe.”

Other than to cite the press reporting and public statements, I obviously cannot speak to pending charges against a juvenile, and I want to emphasize that the intent of the juvenile criminal code is rehabilitation, which I strongly support. But I also need to tell this committee that, although Chief Ahern was speaking about that one case, the public in Maine is in fact not safe. I tell you that based on the cases I see as District Attorney, the cases I prosecuted as an Assistant DA, our recent experience last month in South Portland, and then on Route 295 in Falmouth, where a family just driving the highway suddenly experienced the trauma and lasting harm of gun violence.

Your constituents are not safe because of the money there is to be made by selling fear, and the availability of things like bump stocks to enable everyday citizens to arm as if for war. Quite simply, if there were no money to be made from the sale of guns and firearm accouterments, we would not be having any of the many conversations we are forced to have due to the mind boggling access to guns and all of the other equipment of war that is currently legally available, like bump stocks and other mechanisms that enable the automatic firing of guns. This includes legal access by high schoolers, as well as their de facto access to all sorts of weaponry when these weapons are otherwise legally kept in the home by an adult.

Ironically, we have a juvenile code that embraces rehabilitation because we know that kids this age have limited capacity to fully appreciate the long term consequences of their choices. But at the same time we allow them access to weapons, even the ability to make them fully automatic. We can't expect them not to act as dozens of impressionable, confused kids have done all over this nation because by and large we are not preventing gun violence through all of the common sense approaches Mainers support. We are fooling ourselves if we believe it can't happen here.

I need to give you some hard news: there is no question about WHETHER Maine's children will experience a school shooting. There is only a question of WHEN. There is no question about HOW some kid in Maine will access firearms and take a fleeting obsession with Hitler, or white supremacy, or hatred of some group, to try and kill other students and staff. There is not a question about IF Maine's schoolkids have access to exactly the same arsenal of weapons that have been used to murder and traumatize thousands of American children over the past few decades. They do.

We hear a lot about hardening our schools right now. This is really about hardening our society and turning towards even greater fear. Fear sells these weapons of war. Putting those weapons aside, shared values and building community fights that impulse. When I hear the calls to harden schools, I can't help but hear the phrase from church - "when you hear his voice, harden not your hearts," If we listen, we can hear the voices of our children, for whom things have already been quite hard these past few years. They are asking us not for metal detectors, but for us to put down needless weapons of war and open our hearts to build communities that teach, accept, embrace and welcome our children into lives built not on fear, but on care.

For these reasons, I urge your support of LD 1340.

I am always happy to take any questions or provide additional information, and thank you so much for your time and concern for the important work we do.