

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH

**IN SUPPORT OF LD 1340 & LD 1011**

**An Act Prohibit the Sale or Possession of Rapid-fire Modification Devices**

**Presented by Representative Melanie Sachs**

**&**

**An Act Requiring the Reporting of Stolen Firearms**

**Presented by Representative Victoria Doudera**

**Before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, May 8, 2023**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Lani Graham. I am a former Chief Public health Officer for Maine. I live in Freeport.

Let's first tackle the biggest source of resistances to these bills, namely, that it won't make any difference in gun deaths and the real problem is mental health. While mental health is indeed a crisis in this country, access to firearms, particularly dangerous ones, is also a problem. In public health we believe in science and tracking of information. The most important source of data to consider is the impact of the federal assault weapon ban, which was passed in 1994 and discontinued in 2004. Gun deaths went down by 70% nationally.<sup>1</sup> So, exactly as hoped, the federal ban made a difference. Too bad LD 1340 is just banning modification devices, I'd love to see Maine join 10 other forward-thinking states and ban assault weapons. But the point is, our country has a firearms death problem because access is too easy and too dangerous for these weapons. Why would anyone not in a war want to turn a rifle into a machine gun?

Let's consider another angle on this issue. The United States has been a consistent outlier compared to other developed nations. When we look at countries with populations over 10 million, the United States ranks first with respect to firearm homicides. Our rate is 13 times higher than

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2022/06/15/did-the-assault-weapons-ban-of-1994-bring-down-mass-shootings-heres-what-the-data-tells-us/>

France and 23 times higher than Australia.<sup>2</sup> To support the concept that it's all about mental health, you would have to believe that the United States has many more mentally disturbed people than any other developed nation. And even though Maine's firearms death rate is relatively low compared to other states, we are high compared to other countries. Maine's firearm death rate is higher than Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and many other countries.<sup>3</sup>

Mental health services are certainly important and should be addressed, but stealing a firearm or being able to buy a device that turns a firearm into a military weapon are also both important issues that must be addressed. It could make the difference between life and death for yourself and for others.

For all these reasons, I hope that you will support these two bills unanimously.

Thank you for your attention. I would be glad to answer any questions you might have.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.healthdata.org/acting-data/gun-violence-united-states-outlier>

<sup>3</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gun-deaths-by-country>