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March 4, 2024

Position: Neutral

Chair Joe Baldacci
Chair Michele Meyer
Committee on Health and Human Services
Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 2237 An Act to Strengthen Public Safety.

Dear Chairs Baldacci and Meyer and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

The National Shooting Sports Foundation ("NSSF") is the trade association for America's firearms, ammunition, hunting and recreational shooting sports industry. Its mission is to promote, protect and preserve hunting and the shooting sports. NSSF has a membership of more than 11,000 manufacturers, distributors, firearms retailers, shooting ranges, and sportsmen's organizations. Our manufacturer members make the firearms used by law-abiding Maine sportsmen, the U.S. military and law enforcement agencies throughout the state. This is to notify you of our neutral position on LD 2237, more specifically the section dealing with the Gun Shop Project.

NSSF and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention over five years ago created a groundbreaking partnership to develop educational materials firearms retailers and shooting facilities can use to raise awareness among their staff and customers about suicide prevention.

The result of this partnership is the toolkit, containing materials that have been reviewed by NSSF's Retailer and Range Advisory Councils. These materials are used by retailers to help develop a basic understanding of suicide and how to recognize and possibly assist individuals who may be going through a difficult time — individuals that retailers may decide not to sell or rent a firearm to or provide access to a range.

Suicide accounts for nearly two-thirds of all firearm deaths in the U.S., more than 23,000 annually — a sobering statistic. Myths about suicide sometimes get in the way of helping others. One of those myths is that a person in crisis who cannot access the means to do themselves harm will simply look for other means. Research tells us that a person is not likely to look for another way to die. There is a brief but intense period of despair leading to a suicidal crisis, and by putting time and distance between a person in crisis and their chosen method for suicide — such as by temporarily removing access to a firearm — can help to save a life.

Suicide is preventable. Knowing what to look for, having a brave conversation, and helping promote the secure storage of firearms when not in use can make a huge difference to someone. The circumstances of a person's life can change over time — sometimes quickly.

Our retailer members are connected to a nationwide effort developed by AFSP called Project 2025, which seeks to reduce the annual U.S. suicide rate by 20 percent by the year 2025. It is an effort that NSSF fully supports. We provide a very extensive tool kit that provides various items for the retailer or range to display at their premises.

The toolkit contains the following items:

Firearms and Suicide Prevention brochure — for staff and customer education

Poster and flyer — for business use

Counter cards — for business use

Window decals — for business use

After a Suicide guide for firearms retailers and range owners — contains guidance and resources to support staff and customers in the aftermath of a suicide attempt or death at a range should such an incident unfortunately occur.

NSSF also provides several short videos providing an introduction to this program and an overview of suicide prevention. Watch at nssf.org/safety/suicide-prevention. The videos are available online only.

Materials such as posters, brochures and counter cards are a good way to teach retailers more about suicide prevention.

With greater understanding of mental health and suicide prevention, and a community that is supporting each other, we can help save lives.

Materials also are posted at afsp.org/firearms and nssf.org/safety/suicide-prevention. The educational brochures may be reordered via the NSSF website as needed.

Our partnership holds tremendous potential to help save lives. As you can see, AFSP and NSSF are working together for a common cause.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jake McGuigan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jake McGuigan
Managing Director State Affairs



Firearms and Suicide Prevention

The National Shooting Sports Foundation's partnership with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention represents a new opportunity to help reduce the misuse of firearms in America.

As the trade association for the firearms industry, NSSF has for more than 50 years encouraged gun owners to safely handle and securely store their firearms. Through brochures such as Firearms Responsibility in the Home, videos like Firearms Safety Depends on You, infographics such as Safe Storage Options for Your Lifestyle and our Project ChildSafe and "Own It? Respect It. Secure It" initiatives, we remind people that safely storing firearms is the No. 1 way to help prevent misuse, accidents and thefts.

Suicide prevention is not an entirely new area of involvement for NSSF. In recent years, we have worked with the Veterans Administration, the State of Utah and mental health agencies to help educate gun owners and the public on how to keep firearms safely out of reach of those who may wish to do themselves harm, as well as helping to reduce firearms accidents, already at historic low levels, even further.

Our partnership with AFSP will enable NSSF to play an important role in a first-of-its-kind national effort to distribute jointly developed suicide prevention educational materials to gun owners. We'll reach the firearms community through the help of firearms retailers and shooting ranges, which make up a portion of NSSF's 11,000 members, along with organizations that run hunter education classes and target shooting competitions.

Our partnership holds tremendous potential to help save lives. As you can see, AFSP and NSSF are working together for a common cause.