



Maine Women's Lobby

March 4, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here today **in support of LD 2237, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources**, and thank Speaker Talbot Ross for sponsoring this important bill.

This week many of us will give or listen to testimony on several gun safety related bills. The current discourse regarding gun safety is frequently accompanied by statements about mental health needs - and indeed, there is a deep intersection between all types of violence, trauma, and mental health. This bill would invest in strengthening mental health crisis intervention mobile response services and establish new mental health crisis receiving centers. Additionally, it would establish an Office of Violence Prevention to "promote effective efforts to reduce violence in the state, including, but not limited to gun violence and related trauma."

In 2020 we saw the largest one-year increase in gun homicides in the United States on record. There was a disproportionate burden on women and women of color in particular. From 2019-2021 the gun homicide rate rose 44% for men and 49% for women.¹ Black women are 5 times as likely to be killed in gun homicides as white women.² Indigenous women are 3 times more likely to be killed in gun homicides than white women.³ And data on homicides of nonbinary and transgender people in the United States shows that most are homicides targeting Black trans women.⁴

The intersection of gun violence and domestic violence is traumatic and lethal for women. Millions of women and families are impacted by domestic violence. One in seven women have experienced abuse with a firearm by an intimate partner. This includes being shot at or

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research Consideration (WONDER), "Underlying Cause of Death, 2018-2021, Bridged Race"
<https://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, Transgender Homicide Tracker, 2017-2022.

threatened with a firearm.⁵ Firearms are used more than any other weapon to uphold power, control, abuse, and kill an intimate partner.

On top of gun-related violence, It's important as well to highlight that the generalized pervasive violence that women face, especially queer, trans, and BIPOC women, is deeply connected to their overall mental health. 40% women in Maine have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by a partner at some point in their lifetime⁶—nearly as many as every person in Maine living north of Augusta. This violence results in significant disparities across every aspect of physical, emotional, and financial well-being. These costs—tangible and intangible—are shouldered by people, families, communities, and the state. Most state systems, from mental health to criminal justice to social services, share the burden of this violence, and low-income Mainers and those without regular access to food and housing stability are both more likely to experience this violence, and to have more barriers to accessing services for their trauma. In some parts of Maine, waiting lists for in-person therapy can be as long as a year⁷ - and that's assuming one has health insurance or resources to cover the cost.

That is why this proposal is so important. It recognizes the links between violence, trauma, and mental health needs, builds out responsive resources, and brings those resources to where people are in our communities. **The impact of that violence and the lack of mental health infrastructure is a gendered issue, and this proposal will have a positive and powerful effect on gender equity, especially on those women who are most historically excluded and marginalized.**

Our society, deeply rooted in misogyny, combined with a poorly funded mental health care infrastructure is a dangerous place for women. We must take these important steps to protect women in Maine, and this bill begins to do that. **We hope you will vote Ought to Pass.**

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague
Maine Women's Lobby

⁵ Everytown analysis of the National Violence Against Women Survey (Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, "Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey," November 2000, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>) and US Census 2020.

⁶ Centers for Disease Control. (2013). National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey State Report: Maine. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportBook.pdf>

⁷ Bangor Daily News. (April 2023). Mainers struggle to find therapists in the state's 'forgotten county' Retrieved from <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/04/03/down-east/washington-county-therapists-shortage/>