

Maine Gun Safety Coalition
Testimony in Support: LD 2237, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-Being by
Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources
March 4, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Legislature's Joint Stating Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Charlotte Warren Nacole Palmer, I live in Hallowell and I'm here to testify in support of LD 2237 on behalf of my client, the Maine Gun Safety Coalition.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in strong support of Speaker Talbot Ross's comprehensive proposal represented in LD 2237, "An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-Being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources."

The Maine Gun Safety Coalition recognizes that Mainers with mental health concerns are more likely to be the target of gun violence than the perpetrator of such atrocities. We also recognize there are serious gaps in access to mental health services in Maine and that those gaps have led to high rates of suicide by gun. Before last year's tragedies forever changed Maine's data around gun violence, suicide by gun has historically represented 90% of gun-related deaths. Speaker Talbot Ross also sees that important connection, and we commend her for offering these solutions.

Part A of the proposal is particularly commendable as it allocates funding to strengthen and expand mental health crisis intervention mobile response services, ensuring they are available 24/7. By incorporating specific types of mental health and crisis intervention experts into existing crisis response systems, we can enhance the quality and effectiveness of these services. Moreover, the requirement for coordination between the state's E-9-1-1 system and the 9-8-8 mobile crisis services system is crucial for ensuring seamless access to support during emergencies.

Part B's establishment of crisis receiving centers across the state is equally important. These centers will provide vital support to individuals dealing with behavioral health, mental health, or substance use issues, offering culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care. By ensuring minimum coverage across various counties, we can address gaps in services and provide equitable access to care for all residents.

Part C's creation of the Office of Violence Prevention within the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention is a proactive measure in addressing violence, including gun violence, and related trauma. By coordinating efforts and promoting evidence-based interventions, this office will play a pivotal role in reducing violence in our communities. Additionally, the establishment of a grant program for community-based violence intervention initiatives underscores the importance of grassroots efforts in interrupting cycles of violence and promoting healing.

Part D's provision of funding to reduce waiting lists and expand access to medication management services is crucial for meeting the timely access requirements under the consent decree. By investing in telehealth services and employee recruitment and retention incentives, we can ensure that individuals

receive the care they need without undue delay, thereby improving outcomes and reducing the burden on our healthcare system.

Part E's focus on suicide prevention through the gun shop project is innovative and impactful. By partnering with gun shops and distributing educational materials and online training courses, we can raise awareness and provide resources to those at risk of self-harm. This proactive approach acknowledges the role that firearms play in suicides and seeks to empower individuals and communities to prevent tragedies.

Finally, Part F's emphasis on public notification procedures during active shooter situations and the study of issues related to notifying firearms dealers about persons in crisis is essential for enhancing public safety. By ensuring that all members of our community, including the deaf and hard of hearing, are informed during emergencies, we can mitigate harm and save lives.

Gun violence represents a significant public health emergency. It is through a combination of approaches, including increased access to health care and support and meaningful gun safety reform that we can best use public policy to keep our communities safe.

I'm glad to answer any questions you might have or to provide you with additional information for the work session.

Thank you.