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**LD 2237 An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding
Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources**

**Testimony in Support
March 4, 2024**

Northern Light Health
Acadia Hospital
A.R. Gould Hospital
Blue Hill Hospital
C.A. Dean Hospital
Eastern Maine Medical Center
Home Care & Hospice
Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mayo Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebastcook Valley Hospital

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am here today providing testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations speaking in support of this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

I want to begin today by thanking the bill sponsor Speaker Talbot Ross, the many co-sponsors and members of the Health and Human Services Committee for your hard work and support to address the challenges in Maine's mental health system of care. This bill addresses the need to fund and build capacity in three key services – crisis mobile response, crisis receiving centers and behavioral health medication management. We often speak about the challenge of behavioral health patients arriving at hospital emergency departments in crisis, unable to access the crisis community services they need and challenges sustaining overall behavioral health due to lack of access to community medication management. Maine's rural communities are particularly challenged by a lack of behavioral health resources. The millions of dollars invested in these key services will have meaningful impact and we look forward to working with community partners expanding behavioral health crisis intervention capacity throughout the state.

The American Hospital Association's Hospitals Against Violence Initiative (#HAV) supports AHA members (including Northern Light Health) in addressing all types of community violence. Violence is one of the nation's major public health and safety issues, both in our communities when violence impacts our patients and in workplaces when individuals harm our staff.

The gun shop project outlined in the bill is a public health education and training program focused on suicide prevention. In February of 2023 Maine CDC reported to the Health and Human Services Committee that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among those ages 15-54 years old in Maine. In 2021, 277 Mainers died by suicide. Of these deaths, 56% (n=158) used a firearm. Men are more likely to die by suicide using a

firearm than women. Most suicide deaths that involved a firearm occurred among individuals older than 25 years of age.

This bill also creates the Office of Violence Prevention located in Maine CDC. The office will coordinate and promote effective efforts to reduce violence in the State, including, but not limited to, gun violence, and related trauma and promote research regarding causes of and evidence-based responses to violence, including gun violence. The bill specifically directs the Office of Violence Prevention to collaborate with a number of other agencies and organizations, including health care providers. We look forward to a collaborative partnership as this work moves forward.

The final section of the bill requires the Commissioner of Public Safety to develop and implement procedures to notify the public, including the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, of active shooter situations. It also requires the commissioner to study issues concerning the development and implementation of procedures to notify all federally licensed firearms dealers in the State regarding all statewide law enforcement alerts relating to persons determined to be dangerous or in mental health crisis. This proposal is an additional public health initiative aligned with a comprehensive approach to addressing violence in our communities and statewide.

We ask that you support this important legislation. Thank you.