

March 4, 2024

Testimony in support of LD 2237 – An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by
Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Service Committee,

I stand before you today to speak in support of LD 2237. My name is Lynn Ellis and I am from Brunswick.

I have been a gun safety advocate for the past 10 years following the tragedy at Sandy Hook in Newtown, CT. I am a member of the Maine UU State Advocacy Network, a board member of Maine Gun Safety Coalition and a retired social worker. I began my career in the '90s working in mental health focused on behavioral treatment. I worked with individuals with severe trauma histories of abuse. In the many years I served as a case manager I did not experience a person in crisis having access to firearms. Fast forward to 2000 and the Columbine High School mass shooting and the years following and the number of firearm related incidents have created a public health crisis of gun violence.

Although I do not associate mental illness as a primary cause of increased gun violence, I do highlight that the increase in numbers of firearms and access to them is a factor. I support Speaker Ross' bill and especially feel encouraged by two aspects of it. 1) the establishment of an Office of Violence Prevention to coordinate and promote effective efforts to reduce violence in our State. Such research is valuable in clearly identifying what constitutes gun violence in Maine and works to educate and train all health care professionals and law enforcement. Several years ago, Rep. Laurie Gramlich presented a bill that was designed to capture data related to fire-arm related deaths and hospitalizations occurring in Maine. The bill passed and the data from this annual report for 2020 (132 suicides) and 2021 (158 suicides) gave us valuable insight into the high rate of suicide in our state. The report has not yet been released with the 2022 data. The second aspect of this bill I fully support will address suicide through the Gun Shop Project designed to provide a voluntary training program to retailers of firearms, instructors and customers with firearm suicide prevention educational materials. Such materials can help to identify a person in crisis and steps to intervene in the sale and possibly prevent a person from doing harm to themselves or others.

I will end with the hope that we can, informed by data and facts, address the issue of gun violence in Maine. The fact that we have seen so many unspeakable examples of tragic loss of life to firearms in Maine over the last year is reason for concern and action. Coupled with the increase in school lockdowns and a heightened anxiety among our population we must take steps to pass common sense legislation. I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2237.