



Maine Medical
Association



TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

AND

THE MAINE OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

IN SUPPORT OF

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

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Room 126, State House, Augusta, Maine
Monday, March 4, 2024

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Paul Cain, M.D., and I am a retired orthopedic surgeon and the President of the Maine Medical Association. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 2237 - An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources on behalf of the Maine Medical Association and the Maine Osteopathic Association.

The Maine Medical Association (MMA) is a professional organization representing more than 4,000 physicians, residents, and medical students in Maine. MMA's mission is to support Maine physicians, advance the quality of medicine in Maine, and promote the health of all Maine people. The Maine Osteopathic Association (MOA) is a professional organization representing more than 1,200 osteopathic physicians, residents, and medical students in Maine.

MMA and MOA have chosen gun safety reform as a priority issue for our Associations because we cannot continue to ignore one of America's most serious public health crises. Deaths by firearms have increased significantly in the last few years including homicide, suicide, and accidents. In 2020, firearms became the leading cause of death among our children from 1 to 19 years of age—eclipsing motor vehicle accidents, cancer, drug overdoses, suffocation, and drownings. 77% of homicides and more than 50% of suicides are the result of a firearm.

We, the physician caregivers for more than a million Mainers, stand up to end this mayhem through the passage of sensible firearm safety laws in Maine and in Washington, DC. The physicians of Maine are dedicated to the health and well-being of our friends, families, and communities. We take our role in advancing public health measures seriously. We have to because we are on the front lines of caring for patients affected by intentional and unintentional firearm related injuries every single day.

I practiced orthopedic surgery in Lewiston-Auburn for over 30 years and raised our family there. I know many of the victims of the mass shooting that took place there. This tragedy has shook our community and shattered our feeling of safety. How many people now avoid public gatherings or feel uncomfortable sending their children to schools? We need to do better.

Suicide is the 4th leading cause of death among 15-54 year old people in Maine, one of the highest rates in the country. How many could be avoided by having effective crisis interventions? No study can give you an exact answer, but surely it would make a difference. We can do better and I think LD 2237 and the other gun safety bills this week are important parts of doing better.

Gun safety reform and the improvement of our mental health delivery system are important *separate* steps towards combating the public health crisis our country is facing. I would like to make it clear that studies show that people with mental health illness account for a small fraction of violent crimes that are committed in this country. They are much more likely to be the victims of violence.

However, it has been shown that at times people with mental illness can go into a crisis situation in which they can be a threat to themselves or others. It is crucial that they and their families have access to treatment centers where the situation can be stabilized. This is a matter of not only public safety, but also a means to relieve the pain these individuals and often, their families or friends are going through. Access to adequate and affordable mental health treatment is desperately needed in our healthcare system, this bill would bring us one step closer to this goal.

LD 2237 would add infrastructure into our state to support our community members by expanding access to services like creating at least six crisis receiving centers. We already know these centers work because Spurwink's center in Portland, which has a multi-disciplinary team of nurses, psychiatrists, case managers, and peers who have lived experience in mental health and substance use struggles, has already supported over 1,200 people since it opened two years ago.

It would also improve coordination between existing community intervention and support programs; reduce waiting lists and expand access to medication management services; and work with stakeholders like gun shops on training for suicide prevention.

LD 2237 is an important step to acknowledging that we need to do more. Thank you for considering the support of Maine's physician community. Sensible gun safety reform needs to happen. We cannot wait for another one of our patients to die. We urge an "ought to pass" vote on both of these bills. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Paul Cain, M.D.

Please contact the Anne Sedlack, Director of Advocacy at the Maine Medical Association and Maine Osteopathic Association if you need to get in touch with me for any further questions