



Maine Medical
Association



**TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
AND
THE MAINE OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION**

IN SUPPORT OF

LD 2086 - An Act to Amend the Law Governing the Disposition of Forfeited Firearms
and

LD 2119 - An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm
Rights

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
Room 438, State House, Augusta, Maine
Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Austin Vaughan, and I am a medical student at the University of New England College of Medicine. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 2086 - An Act to Amend the Law Governing the Disposition of Forfeited Firearms and LD 2119 - An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm Rights 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 whose mission is to serve the Osteopathic profession of the State of Maine through a coordinated effort of professional education, advocacy, and member services in order to ensure the availability of quality osteopathic health care to the people of this State.

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. One half of the murders of women are committed by a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Surely this is not what our forefathers imagined when they codified the right to bear arms in our Constitution.

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. The physicians of Maine are dedicated to the health and well-being of our communities. We take our role in advancing public health measures seriously. We have no choice: because we are on the front lines of caring for patients affected by gun-related injuries every day.

Regarding LD 2086, we support any move to recognize that some firearms are more dangerous than others. Assault weapons are meant to cause rapid and devastating harm to the human body – harm that can be near impossible for any clinician to reverse. In the time of the federal Assault Weapons Ban, research shows a 37% decrease in the amount of gun massacres involving 6 or more deaths, and an increase by 183% once the ban lapsed. We think that LD 2086 is an important step in safety efforts, but we further would like to encourage this committee to also ban the sale and transfer of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines in Maine.

As for LD 2119, we appreciate this bill because it recognizes that there are some situations in which people recognize on their own that they aren't in the right mental space to have a firearm. Suicide is the 4th leading cause of death among 15-54 year old people in Maine, one of the highest rates in the country. The medical community frequently participates in difficult conversations with patients about how a life event might cause them to be at a heightened risk of harm, both to themselves and others. Steps like those proposed in LD 2119 empower our patients with options to protect themselves from those precarious moments.

Growing up in the state of Florida, I have been surrounded by the impact of mass shootings. From the terror of being locked down during the shooting on FSU's campus, the grief felt for friends who lost loved ones in the massacres at Pulse Nightclub and MSD High, and most recently, to the helplessness felt while I did my rotations at CMMC in October – my life has been inundated by gun violence. I've always dreamed of being a pediatrician, with the hope that when I finish my training, I can help save children's lives. But the truth is that no amount of healing I do throughout my career will save more lives than the steps this committee can take starting today.

Thank you for considering the support of Maine's physician community for L.D. 2086 and LD 2119: a community which refuses to idly stand by and watch any more of our patients needlessly lose their lives. We urge an "ought to pass" vote on both bills. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Thank you,
Austin Vaughan

Please contact Anne Sedlack, Director of Advocacy at the Maine Medical Association and Maine Osteopathic Association if you need to get in touch with any further questions or would like additional information on the information cited in our testimony.¹

¹<https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/dem/releases/studies-gun-massacre-deaths-dropped-during-assault-weapons-ban-increased-after-expiration>;
<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/phdata/non-dhp-pdf-doc/suicide-quick-facts-2007.pdf>.