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Testimony in Support: LD.2086 - An Act to Amend the Law Governing the Disposition of Forfeited Firearms - w/ amendment from sponsor Sen. Carney, and LD 2119 An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm Rights

March 5, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Nacole Palmer. I live in Bowdoin, and I serve as the executive director of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition.

The Coalition was founded in 2000 in response to tragedy, the Columbine High School shooting. I was living in Connecticut in 2012, and I learned in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre that I was 1 degree of separation away from 5 of the children who were slaughtered in their classroom by a Bushmaster "assault-style" weapon. Many of those children could not be visually identified, so great was the damage to their little bodies.

Like many horrified Americans, Sandy Hook was what compelled me to join the gun violence prevention movement. Among the many thoughts that kept me up at night after that terrible Friday in December was, "Who stands for the children?" Certainly, their teacher, their principal, and three other adults in the school stood between an assault weapon and the children, but their human bodies were no match for the weapon whose sole purpose is to kill as many people as it can. Human flesh is no match for an assault weapon; that much is clear.

But we are not helpless. We can stop this madness. You have the power to stop this avoidable carnage. I am here today to ask you to stand up for the children of Maine, for all the people of Maine, who deserve to live without the fear that they could be shot anywhere, any time.

Who stands up for them?

What can those of us, who may never be faced with the horrible decision to throw ourselves between bullets and innocents, do to stop this madness? It turns out that there is quite a bit we can do. There are many, many steps we can take to reduce day to day gun violence, to reduce suicide, and to reduce horrible massacres like the one that brought Maine to its knees on October 25.

I urge you to pass LD 2086 and LD 2119, with the amendments offered by their sponsors. There is a reason that machine guns are illegal in this country. Simple devices like bump stocks, glock switches, and binary triggers (which are not yet named in this amendment), that effectively create machine guns from less deadly weapons, should be illegal in Maine state law, as it already is federally.

MGSC, and the 60+ organizations who are partnering with us, also call on this committee to further amend LD 2086 to ban the sale of assault-style weapons. It is not bump stocks and binary triggers alone that kills people; it is the weapons themselves, which have no place in our society.

We also support the destruction of the weapons that are in police custody, thereby reducing the burden on police departments of safely storing them, and reducing the number of guns in circulation, that can create harm in our communities.

We also support the ability of individuals who are suffering from suicidal ideation to voluntarily add themselves to a do not sell list. This is in no way a replacement for an extreme risk protection order or background checks. But we have learned that every possible legal step that can be taken to reduce gun violence should be, and in Maine, where 90% of our gun deaths are suicide (Lewiston notwithstanding), reducing suicides will have a huge impact on reducing Maine's overall gun deaths.

The weapon in the Lewiston Massacre was a Ruger AR-10, which is designed to be even more powerful than an AR-15. Tragically, it was. And the bullets that riddled the bodies of 31 Mainers that night, killing 18 of them, were also designed to bounce around inside the bodies of those unfortunate souls, to wreak as much havoc as they could.

The more than 1,000 people who came to this State House on January 3, and the hundreds of thousands of Mainers they represent, strongly support an assault weapons ban, in addition to the basic gun safety measures before you today.

I hope that you, each of you on this committee, will stand for the children, and the safety of all the people of Maine, by voting yes on LD 2086 and LD 2119, as amended. Please also add the real assault weapons ban and high capacity magazine ban that our society and our children deserve.