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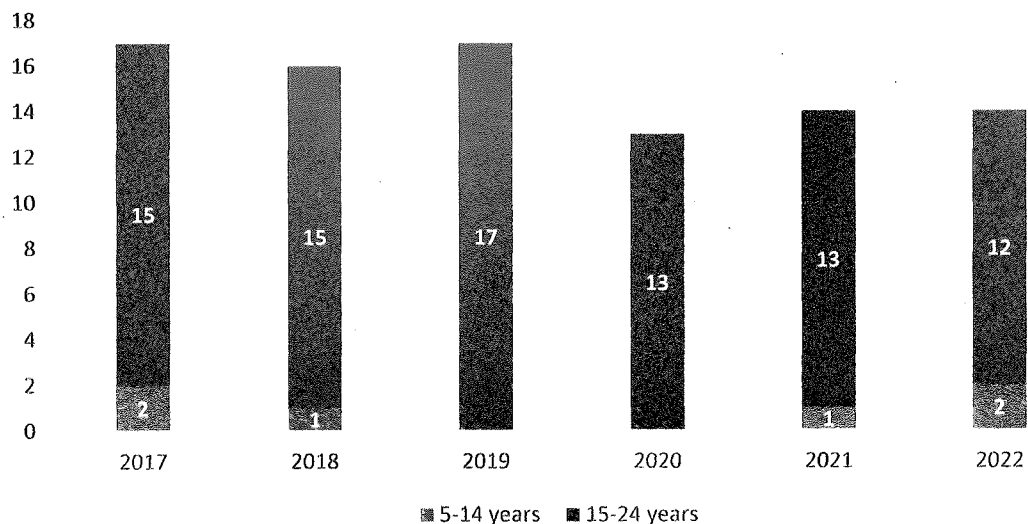
Subject: Testimony in Support of LD 2119, "An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm Rights"

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary, my name is Joe Anderson. I am a resident of Portland, a pediatric hospitalist in Lewiston, and I serve on the board of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am here to express our strong support for LD 2119, "An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearm Rights." This proposed legislation is a crucial step toward addressing the significant public health issue of suicide by firearm in the state of Maine. We ask that you vote Ought to Pass on this bill.

The Maine Chapter of the AAP is a professional organization representing over 275 pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists working together to further our mission to *improve the lives of children and adolescents in Maine*. Often, we think of suicide in terms of the singular life lost, as noted in the chart below highlighting the unrelenting trend of firearm suicide of children, adolescents, and young adults.

Annual deaths due to suicide by firearm in Maine, Ages 5-24

Source: Maine Data, Research and Vital Statistics Death Data Dashboard, data generated 3/4/24



The impact on our pediatric community is amplified when considering that both death by suicide and exposure to firearm violence are both independent adverse childhood experiences, which in aggregate are shown to have long-term negative health consequences. Siblings, friends, and classmates are all affected by the tragedy, impacting their personal health outcomes and driving negative health outcomes across our population. Moreover, this chart does not reflect the more than 100 Maine residents over the age of 25 who also die by firearm suicide, and are often the parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, caregiver, or teacher to children. Suicide's real and complete impact on our state's collective physical and mental health is difficult to grasp, let alone communicate with charts and data.

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Suicide is a leading cause of death in Maine, and access to lethal means, particularly firearms, increases the risk of completed suicide. This bill recognizes the importance of empowering individuals in crisis to take voluntary steps to reduce their risk of self-harm by temporarily waiving their firearm rights. By allowing individuals to voluntarily and temporarily waive their right to purchase or receive a firearm during times of heightened risk, LD 2119 promotes a comprehensive, compassionate and self-driven approach to suicide prevention.

Key Points in Support of LD 2119:

Voluntary Nature: LD 2119 is designed to be a voluntary measure, respecting the autonomy and rights of individuals while providing a mechanism for them to make responsible decisions about their access to firearms during times of crisis.

Temporary Waiver: The bill allows for a temporary waiver of firearm rights, recognizing that periods of crisis can be transient. It allows an individual to revoke their voluntary waiver starting one week after the initial filing. This approach strikes a balance between public safety and individual rights and allows individuals to regain their right to purchase a firearm when they feel they are no longer in crisis.

Suicide Prevention: Access to lethal means, especially firearms, significantly increases the risk of completed suicide. LD 2119 offers a preventive strategy to reduce the immediate risk during times of crisis, potentially saving lives.

Protection of the Individual: The information submitted as part of a voluntary waiver of firearm rights is held in a confidential manner, except as needed to prevent the purchase of a firearm. An individual's decision to utilize this process cannot be considered by a court in a legal proceeding, nor can an individual be coerced into submitting to a voluntary waiver of rights as a condition for receiving employment, benefits, or services. Once revoked, records are destroyed.

Mental Health Support: The legislation encourages individuals to seek mental health support without the fear of permanent consequences to their firearm rights. It fosters a culture that values mental health care and seeks to remove barriers to help-seeking behavior.

In conclusion, the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics urges the Committee to support LD 2119 as a crucial step in suicide prevention. This legislation acknowledges the complex interplay between mental health and access to lethal means and offers a compassionate and practical solution. We believe that LD 2119 has the potential to make a significant positive impact on public health in Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We are available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Anderson DO".

Joe Anderson, DO, FAAP

Advocacy Chair, Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics