



**American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention**

Maine

March 5, 2024

The Honorable Anne Carney & Matt Moonen  
Chairpersons, Joint Committee on Judiciary  
Maine State House  
2 State House Station,  
Augusta, ME 04333

**RE: Support LD 2119, An Act to Support Suicide Prevention by Allowing the Voluntary Waiver of Firearms Rights**

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of LD 2119 from my perspectives as the Executive Director of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and as a suicide loss survivor.

AFSP is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide through research, education, support, and advocacy. As the nation's largest private funder of suicide prevention research, we know that suicide is a leading yet preventable public health problem. AFSP supports the implementation of voluntary removal initiatives including temporary transfer exceptions, community storage options, and Voluntary Do Not Sell Lists, as important components of suicide prevention.

Access to lethal means during a suicidal crisis is strongly linked to suicide. Firearms have the highest suicide case fatality rate relative to other commonly used means in the United States, with research indicating that the odds of death in a suicide attempt by firearm are 2.6 times greater than with suffocation, the second most lethal method. Here in Maine, 57% of all suicides were by firearm.

Firearms are also the most used method of suicide. In Maine, 89% of firearm deaths were suicides in 2021. Restricting access to firearms has consistently been linked to reduced suicide. For example, a review of 49 studies examining firearm restriction approaches to suicide prevention found that 98% of these interventions were superior to the control condition (Mann et al., 2021; American Journal of Psychiatry) and concluded that means restriction approaches, including firearm restriction, were among the four best options considered in their review for preventing suicide.

LD 2119 would establish a voluntary waiver of firearms rights for individuals in Maine to voluntarily and proactively waive the right to purchase or receive a firearm. This decision would be made when in good mental health, thus empowering residents with a history of serious mental illness or a history of prior suicide attempt(s) to protect themselves against future impulsive firearm suicide. How long the individual stays on the registry is up to them, and removal requests would have to be approved promptly. Other states including Washington, Virginia, and Utah have enacted voluntary do not sell lists.

LD 2119 would also allow Mainers to enter into firearm hold agreements, in which they voluntarily and temporarily transfer a firearm for the purpose of preventing a suicide attempt using a firearm and would limit liability for individuals who return firearms to the owner at the end of the hold agreement. Other states including Montana and Tennessee have enacted similar legislation. Implementing these initiatives in our state would help prevent the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future.

According to the Centers for Disease Control 2021 Suicide Data Report:

- Suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in Maine.
- Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for Mainers 10 to 44 years of age.

Research shows us that putting time and distance between a person at risk and the lethal method can save their life. When people at risk of suicide are unable to access a lethal suicide method - such as a firearm - most will not attempt suicide with by other means. Temporary restriction of access to a firearm during a time of increased risk gives individuals who are suicidal something they desperately need: time. Time for the intense suicidal risk to diminish and time for someone to intervene with mental health support and resources. People considering suicide are typically ambivalent about life; part of them wants to live, but part of them is focused on dying to stop the unbearable pain they are experiencing. This bill provides a lifeline to that part of them that wants to live and saves their loved ones and communities from the devastating impact of their suicide.

Sincerely,



**Shamera Simpson**

Executive Director

AFSP Maine