

March 7, 2024

Paul Potvin MD, Hampden

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Paul Potvin and I am from Hampden.

I am testifying in support of both LD 2224 - An Act to Strengthen Public Safety by Improving Maine's Firearm Laws and Mental Health System and LD 2238 - An Act to Address Gun Violence in Maine by Requiring a Waiting Period for Certain Firearm Purchases

I am a retired Emergency Medicine physician having worked in Rural Maine ERs for over 40 years. I am also an avid hunter and sportsman, and have been hunting in Maine for 44 years.

I want to start by saying that as a hunter and gun owner, I do not feel that my ability to buy, sell, own and use firearms is the least bit threatened by this proposed legislation. Such sensible public safety measures do not infringe on the rights of law abiding citizens.

The gun lobby tries to instill a fear of us losing our gun rights. I don't buy it. The fear I have felt, and sadly so is for the health and safety of my daughter, a school principal, and my grandsons now entering the school system, and myself and all my loved ones, and all of you, and your children, knowing that a violent criminal can today go out and buy a gun without a background check, and subject us all to more senseless violent tragedy. It is unfathomable that anyone would oppose universal background checks. At most it is a minor expense or inconvenience in exchange for a potentially priceless benefit.

The extreme risk protection law allows due process for the person in crisis while protecting them and every else from gun violence. It is improved with this legislation but actually should be expanded to allow family members to petition the court directly as well, and not require a mental health evaluation. .

Of all the patients I have seen over the years with suicide attempts, only one survived an attempt with a firearm. Suicide attempts from firearms don't usually make it to the ER. They don't get a second chance. The one I saw survived the gunshot wound to the head, and months later came back to thank us for saving her life, expressing the kind of gratitude to be alive that many of the survivors of non firearm related attempts express. We absolutely need to invest our resources in improving our mental health and our mental health services, but that is insufficient. People will still get depressed, suicidal, angry and impulsive. We do them and their loved ones a great service by inserting a waiting period making it more difficult for them to impulsively shoot someone including themselves. It affords time for them to cool off, time to get help, and an opportunity for family and friends to intervene.

It doesn't matter whether these safety measures would have prevented any one specific shooting. They are highly likely to prevent one or more in the future. (State level gun laws passed in 40 states between 1991 and 2016 showed strong consistent reductions in both firearm homicides and suicides and saved an estimated 4297 lives in 2016 alone.¹) A poll conducted last June showed that 72% of Maine voters supported both universal background checks and a 72 hour waiting period². That number is likely even higher now.

I urge you to vote ought to pass on both of these bills, and I also ask for amendments providing for universal background checks and a strengthened extreme protection law.

Thank you for your consideration and your work on this topic. I am happy to answer questions, and I also know that there are others that will follow that might be able to answer specific questions.

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37732847/>

² [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61a8f23cef08d75677e0f092/t/6488f11ffbc89f616de57b02/1686696223603/Maine+Poll+Shows+Broad+Support+for+Background+Checks,+72+Hr+Waiting+Periods+\(4\).pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61a8f23cef08d75677e0f092/t/6488f11ffbc89f616de57b02/1686696223603/Maine+Poll+Shows+Broad+Support+for+Background+Checks,+72+Hr+Waiting+Periods+(4).pdf)