

Testimony in support of 72 hour waiting periods for firearm sales

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Good morning, committee members. My name is Michele Stapleton and I live in Brunswick. I come to the issue of gun safety after a career in journalism, including time at the Bangor Daily News. My work took me to the scene of too much gun violence.

I support mandatory background checks, a 72-hour waiting periods for firearm sales, plus a real extreme risk protection order (a Red Flag law), but since I have only two minutes I've chosen to speak just to the waiting period.

You all know that the U.S. is an outlier among developed countries for its number of guns and gun deaths.

We own 120 guns per 100 people.

We had over 42,888 gun deaths in 2023. Gun deaths have risen to the point where they equal or exceed car deaths (44,450 in 2023.)

Mass shootings, like ours last year in Lewiston and Bowdoinham get the most attention, but the overwhelming majority of people who die from guns in the U.S. don't die because someone shot them, they die because they shot themselves.

Nationwide almost two thirds of gun deaths are suicides (61%), but in Maine, 89% of gun deaths are suicides

Public health officials are concerned about access to guns because guns are so extremely efficient at causing death.

If you try to kill yourself by poisoning or slashing your wrists -- only 6-7% of those attempts succeed. Whereas the rate of success if you try to kill yourself with a gun is over 90%.

The most dangerous myth about suicide is that it's inevitable. Yet suicides tend to be impulsive actions, decided within minutes or hours, often less than a day before the attempt.

And, nine out of ten people who attempt suicide and survive will not go on to die by suicide at a later date. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/> This makes the method they choose for that attempt extremely important. If we can keep them away from a gun just for just a few days we can save their lives.

For example, the Israeli Defense Force instituted a policy whereby soldiers couldn't bring their guns home on the weekend. Firearm suicides dropped by 40%.

Similarly, Australia instituted a massive gun buy back in 1996 taking about a fifth of the country's guns, a massive decrease in suicides followed.

There's an article I've cited at the end of my paper that compared gun suicide rates in Connecticut and Missouri when Connecticut established a "permit to purchase" law, which required a background check and eight hours of safety training for those seeking to buy a handgun, basically making guns hard to buy quickly. Gun suicides rates plummeted 15.4 percent. Missouri, on the other hand, repealed a similar law, making guns easy to get quickly. Their gun suicide rates shot up by 16.1 percent.

If the person attempting suicide was your friend, your family member, just think what a life and death difference a three-day waiting period could make.

Connecticut made it harder to get guns — and suicides fell significantly, <https://www.vox.com/2015/9/2/9242147/gun-control-connecticut-suicides>