



Pen Bay Medical Center

MaineHealth

Testimony of Dr. Tyler Giberson Chief of Emergency Medicine, Pen Bay Medical Center In Support of LD 2224

“An Act to Strengthen Public Safety by Improving Maine’s Firearm Law and Mental Health System”

May 7, 2024

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice, thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Tyler Giberson. I am an Emergency Medicine Physician. I am a father of two wonderful boys. I am the husband of a family medicine physician. I am a graduate of the University of Maine. And I am a Mainer.

I was born and raised roughly 60 miles north of here in Bingham. In this place my family called home, life seemed to revolve around three main things: Hard work, basketball, and hunting. Like many households in this State, the first weekend in November was a major holiday. I spent countless mornings frozen in a seat high up in a Beech tree listening to the squirrels, the birds and my father telling me to stop moving around so much. I learned early on what a firearm was used for and how to use it responsibly. I continue to hunt every November and am thankful for the opportunity to do so.

I stand before you today as a representative of MaineHealth, which provides health care to the residents of nine counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. My career as an Emergency Physician started in Atlanta, Georgia at Emory University & Grady Memorial Hospital. Grady is one of the busiest trauma centers in the country and sees an astonishing number of victims of gun violence. It was not uncommon to see 10+ patients with gun-shot wounds in an 8 hour shift. I became an expert at caring for patients suffering from penetrating trauma and, unfortunately, an expert at telling parents their child did not survive their injuries. To this day, I can still see so many faces of mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers who just learned their loved one had been taken away as a victim of gun violence.

After 3 years in Atlanta, I moved home to Maine. I can tell you with the utmost honesty that moving to a state where I would not have to have these conversations with families and where I felt my kids were safe playing on the streets at night played a tremendous role in our decision to move back. I now serve as the Chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine at Pen Bay Medical Center in Rockport, and as an Attending Physician at Maine Medical Center in Portland. On the night of October 25th, I happened to be working the 2PM – 11PM shift in the ER at Maine Medical Center. I took a call from incident command in Lewiston regarding the shooting and helped orchestrate our preparation for victims of this mass casualty. This tragic day continues to live with all of us and in the discussions of firearm policy we are now in the Post-Lewiston era.

MaineHealth supports this proposal to strengthen of the current Weapons Restriction Law by giving law enforcement officers the ability to apply for a warrant to take a subject into protective custody if it is determined the subject represents a significant threat.

It has been disheartening to hear leaders of our sheriffs' offices say the current law is "useless", and we hope that this step will provide a necessary tool for law enforcement to use this important law. And though we support this bill as a helpful step, we also feel strongly that the separation of violence and medicine is a very important consideration. Thus, we encourage you to consider joining the 22 states that have protected their citizens by enacting a red flag law, which allows or weapons to be restricted based on the sole threat of violence, without the unnecessary step of requiring a psychological evaluation as well.

The day following the mass shooting in Lewiston, after a very sleepless post-evening shift, I put my two young children in the truck and drove them to daycare. I sat in front of the daycare knowing I had to bring them in. I knew I had to get back to work, but I was unable to open the door. I was terrified. My wife was terrified. Through tears and out of necessity, I dropped them off.

We deserve better. Our children deserve better. And I ask you to be a part of the solution.

We can pass responsible gun legislation that allows our state to continue to be a mecca for sportsmen, protects the rights of responsible firearm owners, and, at the same time, improves the safety of our State and the safety of our children.

Thank You for your time, and I would be happy to answer questions.