



March 7, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here today **in support of LD 2224, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety by Improving Maine's Firearm Laws and Mental Health System**, and thank Governor Mills for bringing forward this important bill.

Research suggests that there are warning signs observable to others before most acts of violence.¹ When a person is considering harming themselves or others, family members and law enforcement often recognize clear warning signs. Extreme risk laws empower these individuals to intervene so that someone in crisis can temporarily be prevented from accessing firearms. There is growing research demonstrating the ability for these gun safety laws to prevent many types of firearm violence, including suicides and other instances of gun violence.

Gun violence is a highly gendered issue, and women and gender minorities bear a disproportionate burden of that violence - especially in the context of this bill, which would address the intersection of gun violence and mental health. For example, more than 3,250 women die by firearm suicide each year.² Suicides represent more than 54% of all gun deaths among women - a rate that is rising - and these deaths disproportionately affect women of color.³ A survey from the CDC found that more than 25% of teen girls reported seriously considering suicide in the past year and more than 10% reported attempting suicide.⁴ This bill would create a clearer pathway for intervention, and potentially address these specific types of circumstances.

¹ Robert Golden, Fred Peterson, and Carla Weiland. The truth about illness and disease. Infobase Publishing 2009.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research Consideration (WONDER), "Underlying Cause of Death, 2018-2021, Bridged Race"
<https://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research Consideration (WONDER), "Underlying Cause of Death, 2018-2021, Bridged Race"
<https://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html>

⁴ "Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary & Trends Report, 2011-2021," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, February 2023, Retrieved on 11/15/23 from
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/yrbs_data-summary-trends_report2023_508.pdf

This bill also expands the number of gun sales performed with a background check. Requiring a background check is a crucial step towards keeping guns out of the hands of those who shouldn't have them, including domestic abusers and people convicted of violent crimes. Again, this is an aspect of the policy which has a very specific impact on women and gender minorities: the intersection of gun violence and domestic violence is traumatic and lethal for women. 40% women in Maine have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by a partner at some point in their lifetime⁵—nearly as many as every person in Maine living north of Augusta. Access to a gun makes it 5 times more likely that a woman will be killed by her abuser. One in seven women have experienced abuse with a firearm by an intimate partner.⁶ Black, Latina, and Indigenous women bear a disproportionate impact, with intimate partner firearm homicides at two or three times the rate of white women.⁷ Women with disabilities are also more likely to experience domestic violence and homicide is the leading cause of death for pregnant and postpartum people, with firearms involved in 70% of those deaths.⁸

Maine's lack of gun safety infrastructure is a gendered issue, and this proposal will have a positive and powerful effect on gender equity, especially on those women who are most historically excluded and marginalized. We hope you will vote Ought to Pass.

Sincerely,

Lily Bohan James
Maine Women's Lobby

⁵ Centers for Disease Control. (2013). National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey State Report: Maine. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportBook.pdf>

⁶ Everytown analysis of the National Violence Against Women Survey (Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, "Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey," November 2000, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>) and US Census 2020.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Web-based Inquiry Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), "WISQARS National Violent Death Reporting System," retrieved on 11/14/23 from <https://wisqarscdc.gov/nydrs/>

⁸ Breiding MJ, Armour BS. The association between disability and intimate partner violence in the United States. *Ann Epidemiol.* 2015 Jun;25(6):455-7. doi: 10.1016/j.annepidem.2015.03.017. Epub 2015 Mar 31. PMID: 25976023; PMCID: PMC4692458.