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RACHEL TALBOT ROSS
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Testimony of Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross supporting

**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**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Good morning Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. I am Representative Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland. I represent House District 118 which is the Portland peninsula and I have the distinct honor of serving as the Speaker of the House. I stand before you today to offering my steadfast 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.

Without a doubt, you will be hearing from a diverse and varied group of Mainers today. The issue of common-sense gun safety reforms, especially in light of the Lewiston tragedy, has elevated the urgency of this conversation. You will hear today and in the coming weeks from constituents, elected officials, first responders, the local and federal government, gun safety advocates, gun owners, sportsmen, hunters, and public health experts.

To use your time most judiciously, I will leave the policy overview and the technical details to the sponsor, Sen. Rotundo and share my own personal experience with these long overdue reforms.

In 1977, my father, the Honorable Gerald Talbot, proposed legislation to enact a three-day waiting period for handgun purchases in Maine. At that time, the weapon causing the most harm was the "Saturday Night Special" - one of the small, easily concealed weapons that were believed to be at the root of many street crimes in the 1970s.

The amount of damage those guns could do in a short amount of time pales in comparison to the damage inflicted by the weapons readily available today. Increases in caliber, ammunition capacity, firing rate and range have made deadly weapons of war immediately accessible with lethal consequences both in Maine and across the country.

In the following years, gun violence in all its forms has become a significant public health crisis. It poses a serious threat to the well-being and safety of individuals and communities, and its impact, often felt for generations, extends beyond just physical injuries. Gun violence can result in loss of life and permanent disability, as well as long-lasting psychological and emotional trauma for survivors, families, witnesses, and the healthcare providers who care for the victims.

In addition to supporting the bills before you today, I also provided testimony on LD 2086 An Act to Amend the Law Governing the Disposition of Forfeited Firearms. Combined with my proposal, LD 2237, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources, we have the opportunity to pass a suite of legislation to protect Mainers and reduce the risk of gun-related incidents.

47 years later, one of the initiatives in this comprehensive package is the very same answer that my father proposed. A 72-hour waiting period. And we have the same reasons for supporting this common-sense legislation. This reform could help prevent so many people from making a terrible, tragic, life-changing decision. Give them time to cool off. To get the help they need.

The goal is to save lives, and research shows that these policies work. The American Academy of Pediatrics found that states with waiting periods experienced 51 percent fewer firearm suicides than states without these policies. Another study found that states that adopted waiting period laws experienced a 17 percent decrease in homicides and a six percent decrease in suicide.

According to the Maine CDC, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for Mainers between the ages of 15-54. In 2021, 277 Mainers died by suicide – more than half involved a firearm.

Governor Mills' legislation creates another layer of protection by extending the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) to advertised, private sales and

incentivizing NICS Checks for Unadvertised, Private Sales. The Governor's bill strengthens Maine law to make it easier to prosecute anyone who sells a gun to someone not allowed to have one and toughens Maine law to make that type of illegal sale a felony, not just a misdemeanor.

Implementing background checks on gun sales makes sense as it serves as a crucial safeguard for public safety. These checks are designed to assess the criminal and mental health history of potential firearm purchasers, helping to prevent firearms from falling into the wrong hands. By scrutinizing an individual's background, authorities can identify and deny gun access to those with a history of violent crimes, domestic abuse, or severe mental health issues. This process acts as a responsible and necessary step in balancing the right to bear arms with the imperative to protect communities from potential threats.

During my time in the Legislature, I have filed multiple pieces of legislation on the issue of gun safety. But on many occasions, these bills met the same fate that my father's proposal in 1977 did. The National Rifle Association asserted their opposition and the bills were swiftly disposed of.

Let us ensure that this time is different.

While the tragedy in Lewiston brought the need to address mass shootings into all of our lives, the action that is required now goes far beyond to the development of effective responses that include all firearms injuries including suicide, homicide, and violent crime. Passing common-sense gun safety measures is a priority to protect Mainers and reduce the risk of gun-related incidents.

Ultimately, this debate isn't a choice between reducing violence and protecting the Second Amendment rights of Mainers. It's about the willingness of a responsible majority to do both.

I urge you to be a part of that responsible majority by supporting these two pieces of legislation. Thank you for your time and your consideration of this important legislation.