

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
State House, Room 438
Thursday, March 7th, 2024

Testimony in Support of 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”

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Mallika Jena, and I am a senior at Bates College in Lewiston. I am here today to testify in support of LD.2224 and LD.2238.

While most of my early childhood took place here in the States, I spent the bulk of my formative years abroad in one of the safest cities in the world. I look back at that time and feel privileged to have never been afraid of any gun violence around me. Coming to college in Maine, supposedly the safest state in the nation, I still felt far-removed from the possibility of gun violence. That is, until the 10th deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history took place 5 minutes away from my college campus. I spent the night of October 25th locked down for 12 hours in our campus library scouring endless terrifying news articles, supporting scared classmates, and receiving calls and texts from friends and family reassuring them throughout the night that I was going to be okay. But the reality is that we had no idea whether we were going to be okay. I think about that night every single day, shocked that these shootings took place just minutes away from me. Shocked that Just-In-Time was no longer just a staple in the Lewiston community that my friends would venture off to. Shocked that it could have been me - that my roommate had asked me the week before if we could go to Just in Time soon on a weekday night just for fun. And then I think about the 18 people who did lose their lives that night. I think about everyone who loved them and how they will forever have to grapple with missing them. It's clear that something needs to change.

The bills brought before the committee today represent the beginning of this needed change. Lawmakers must acknowledge the urgency of the situation and that preventable tragedies should never be the norm. Mandatory 72-hour waiting periods and comprehensive background checks for all gun sales are crucial steps in improving gun safety in Maine. Enhancing the existing 'Yellow Flag Law' and considering the implementation of a 'Red Flag Law' is another necessary step forward in preventing further tragedies in our state. As college students, we should be in classes right now, not addressing you all and urging you to finally prioritize these concerns.

Please, listen to our voices and vote “Ought to Pass” on LD.2224 and LD.2238. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mallika Jena
Lewiston