



**Testimony in support of LD 2224  
An Act to Strengthen Public Safety by Improving Maine's Firearm Laws and Mental  
Health System, *and***

**Testimony in support of LD 2238  
An Act to Address Gun Violence in Maine by Requiring a Waiting Period for  
Certain Firearm Purchases**

**From: The Board of Directors of Healthy Acadia  
March 7, 2024**

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, My name is Art Blank, and **I am testifying on behalf of Healthy Acadia in strong support of LD 2224 and LD 2238.** I serve as the Vice-Chair of Healthy Acadia, a nonprofit community health organization primarily serving Hancock and Washington counties, in addition to partnering with others to deliver health services across the state.

We at Healthy Acadia are deeply concerned about gun violence as a key threat to our public health. As a former Hospital CEO, I've been personally frustrated that gun violence - a preventable cause of injury and death and a leading public health issue - has been downplayed for so many years, while our community members continue to suffer. The rates of gun suicide are particularly alarming; suicide attempts by gunfire result in death 85% of the time, compared to just 3% for drug overdoses, the leading method of attempted suicide. A recent report showed 89% of Maine's gun deaths in 2021 were suicides. Each of these events not only impacts the victim and their immediate family but the broader community as well.

Healthy Acadia supports a public health approach to gun safety, to uphold Maine's traditions of appropriate gun use, while supporting common-sense policies regarding access to guns that protect the safety and well-being of all Mainers. We believe both measures you are discussing today meet this goal.

The purchase of a gun should not be an impulse buy. Establishing a short waiting period as outlined in LD 2238 would allow for anyone being driven by emotion to reconsider their use of a firearm. Common sense affirms what studies have shown: that waiting periods reduce the rates of suicides and homicides, including in cases of domestic violence.



Background checks, an already established process to prevent those at highest risk of causing violence from accessing firearms, should be universally required when they are purchased. The approach outlined in LD 2224 is innovative and we believe will effectively close the venue loophole.

In the interest of time, I would refer you to Healthy Acadia's Statement on Gun Safety, attached to this testimony for further information. We urge you to support both LD 2238 and LD 2224. Thank you for your time and commitment to a safe, healthy, and vibrant Maine.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Rev. Sara Gavit, Chair, Healthy Acadia Board of Directors, Calais  
Art Blank, Vice-Chair, Healthy Acadia Board of Directors, Bar Harbor



## STATEMENT ON GUN SAFETY

### Healthy Acadia

Healthy Acadia is dedicated to working with community members and partners to build safe, healthy, vibrant communities across the region, and to help all people thrive and reach their potential. We are deeply concerned about gun violence as a key threat to the safety, health, and well-being of our communities. We support a public health approach to gun safety, to uphold Maine's traditions of safe and appropriate gun use, such as hunting, and to ensure safety and well-being for all Mainers.

As we witnessed in Lewiston on October 25, 2023, our communities in Maine are not immune to the tragic, horrific mass shootings that have devastated communities across the United States. Our hearts go out to the victims of the Lewiston shooting - and of all shootings, their families and loved ones, law enforcement and other first responders, and everyone who grapples with trauma, grief, fear, anger, and more in the wake of these shootings. We know that we can and must do more to protect our communities from the threat and devastation that shootings like these cause.

Gun violence is a leading cause of premature death, as well as disability and injury. More than 42,000 people in the U.S. die from gun violence on average each year, and tens of thousands more are injured.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. has among the highest gun death rates in the world for all ages, and in particular for children. It is the leading cause of death for children (1-17) in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Guns are the leading method of suicide in the U.S., causing more than half of all suicide deaths.<sup>3</sup> In Maine, while our homicide rate has historically been below the national average, we know that this can change abruptly, as we witnessed in Lewiston. In addition, our rate of suicides and suicide attempts using firearms is much higher - the rate of death from a gun suicide is 33% higher in Maine than in the U.S. as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Based on a recent state report, 89% of Maine's gun deaths in 2021 were suicides.<sup>5</sup>

The rates of gun suicide are particularly alarming, as suicide attempts by gunfire result in death 85% of the time, in comparison with just 3% for the leading method of attempted suicide, drug

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal/index.html>; <https://www.bradyunited.org/key-statistics>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>;

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pressherald.com/2022/06/08/gun-suicides-in-maine-far-outpace-u-s-rate/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/9742>

overdose.<sup>6</sup> Nearly 90% of people who survive an attempted suicide do not go on to die by suicide, and so the lethality of suicide attempts by firearms is particularly devastating, destroying the chance for a person to recover.<sup>7</sup> Each of these events not only impacts the victim and their immediate family but the broader community as well. Fear, anxiety, grief, and uncertainty ripple through the victim's family and neighborhood in ever-widening circles as a stone thrown in a lake.

Healthy Acadia stands in strong support of gun violence prevention to reduce the devastation caused by firearms as a critical part of ensuring safety, health, and well-being for all people across our communities. We are committed to working with our team and partners to:

- Promote gun safety education, so that Mainers using guns appropriately can do so safely, without harm to themselves or others;
- Promote safe gun storage, so that individuals who should not have access to guns, especially children, will not accidentally obtain access;
- Support continued advocacy to ensure that school and community-based activities, trainings, drills, and education related to shootings follow evidence-based and best practices, promoting resilience and health, and minimizing trauma.
- Support efforts at the state level to continue to collect data on gun-related deaths and injuries in order to understand the causes and evaluate interventions;
- Identify risk factors associated with gun violence, as well as resilience/protective factors that help prevent gun violence (e.g. access to mental health services, youth resilience programs, etc.);
- Continue to develop, implement, and evaluate interventions and policies to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors;
- Support common-sense policies regarding access to guns that support the safety and well-being of all Mainers;
- And more, guided by community needs and priorities.

We are committed to these and other actions to support a thoughtful public health approach to gun safety, to continue to support Maine's traditions of safe gun use, and to ensure health and safety for all Mainers. We are committed to building communities in which all people can grow and thrive, have ready access to resources that support the challenges they face, and reach their full potential.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine\\_article/guns-suicide/#:~:text=Though%20guns%20are%20not%20the,then%203%20percent%20of%20cases.\)](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/guns-suicide/#:~:text=Though%20guns%20are%20not%20the,then%203%20percent%20of%20cases.)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine\\_article/guns-suicide/#:~:text=Though%20guns%20are%20not%20the,than%203%20percent%20of%20cases.\)](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/guns-suicide/#:~:text=Though%20guns%20are%20not%20the,than%203%20percent%20of%20cases.)