

LD 2238: An Act to Address Gun Violence in Maine by Requiring a Waiting Period for Firearm Purchases

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

NAMI Maine strongly supports the passage of LD 2238 as one small but significant step toward increasing the safety of Maine citizens. Though many studies show that mandatory waiting time for firearm purchase decrease the incidence of homicide deaths, I will focus my remarks on the potential reduction in suicide deaths. NAMI Maine supports a small highly dedicated team of professionals committed to suicide prevention and response after a suicide loss. Let me present a few facts about suicide in Maine.

- Maine experiences an average of 262 suicides annually; a death every 33 hours with 30 people under age 25 (2019-21).
- 54% of those suicides involve a firearm as means.
- In 2021 Maine had 178 firearm deaths, 89% were suicides, only 9.5% were homicides.
- For most people, a suicide crisis is transient and treatable, it passes.
- For many, the crisis comes quickly and impulsivity plays a role. For those with a near lethal suicide attempt, 25-50% of the attempts occurred within minutes or hours of the triggering event; especially in those under age 35 (based on multiple studies).
- If a firearm is chosen as the means for a suicide attempt, the lethality rate approaches 90%; once the trigger is pulled, there is no turning back.
- It is important to recognize that for those who attempt suicide and survive, 90% go on to live their lives and do not die by suicide.

LD 2238 supports a 72 hour waiting period following the decision to purchase a firearm. This crucial three days allows for time; time for the crisis to pass or for helpers to intervene. Studies show that in states that have enacted waiting periods, lives are saved both by reduction in homicides and in a reduction in suicide deaths.

If this law was in place some years ago it might have saved the life of a, brilliant, creative and gifted 24 year old young man, who in the grips of acute depression ended his life less than 2 days after purchasing a firearm. I think of his tragic loss often, of his family and the community who still mourn his death. Every life saved from suicide is an immeasurable gift, and this modest change might save many lives.

NAMI Maine strongly advocates gun safety measures aimed at curbing the risk of suicide, and LD 2238 represents a readily attainable opportunity to effect meaningful change. In times of despair, let us rally behind initiatives that offer solace and support, fostering resilience and the restoration of hope.—

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA

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