

# Maine Chapter

INCORPORATED IN MAINE

American Academy of Pediatrics  
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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March 7, 2024

## Subject: Testimony in Support of LD 2238, "An Act to Address Gun Violence in Maine by Requiring a Waiting Period for Certain Firearm Purchases"

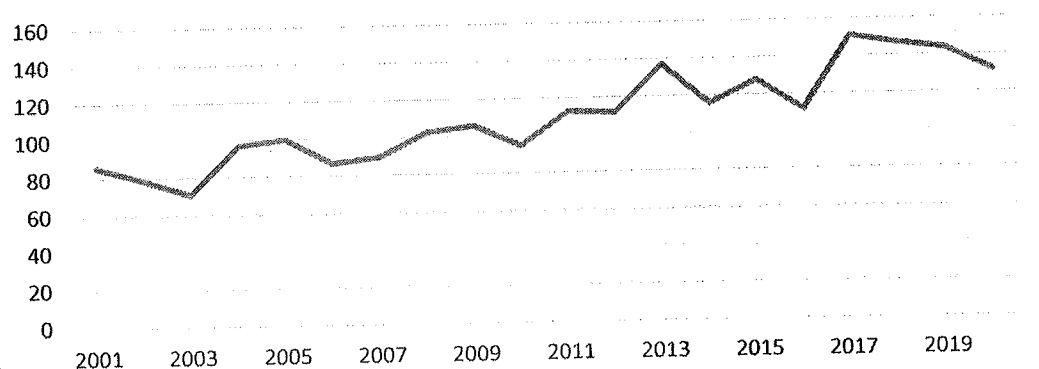
Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary, my name is Joe Anderson. I am a resident of Portland, a pediatric hospitalist in Lewiston, and I serve on the board of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am here to express our support for LD 2238, "An Act to Address Gun Violence in Maine by Requiring a Waiting Period for Certain Firearm Purchases."

The Maine Chapter of the AAP is a professional organization representing over 275 pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists working together to further our mission *to improve the lives of children and adolescents in Maine*. Waiting periods are a prevention method for any impulsive act involving a firearm, including both firearm suicide as well as intentional gun violence. We know that in Maine, most gun deaths (upwards of 90%) are suicides, not homicides. Some may wonder why pediatricians feel the need to implement a waiting period for firearm purchases as a suicide prevention tool, when in Maine, you must be 18 years old to purchase a firearm.

Often, we think of suicide in terms of the singular life lost – and certainly that is the most identifiable and significant consequence. However, the impact of suicide on our pediatric community, especially the suicide of trusted adults in their lives, is significant. Experiencing suicide in the family and exposure to firearm violence are both independent adverse childhood experiences, which are correlated with long-term negative health consequences.

Suicide deaths by firearm are on the rise in Maine, as highlighted in the chart below. In 2021, 56% of those deaths involved a firearm.

Suicide Deaths by Firearm in Maine  
2001 - 2020<sup>1</sup>



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Waiting periods are an under-utilized, evidence-based strategy for reducing death and injuries by firearms. Waiting periods give law enforcement sufficient time to perform an accurate background check, and additionally create a “cooling off” period to prevent acts of violence or suicide attempts. States with such laws had 51% fewer firearm suicides than those without. Over 70% of Americans without a firearm in the home support longer waiting periods for gun purchases.<sup>2</sup>

Although a similar proposal was considered in 2023 and was ultimately unsuccessful, we believe that recent events have been a turning point – for our citizens and our elected representatives – to reconsider means of reducing suicides and gun violence in our state. This waiting period is not intended to infringe upon the rights of responsible gun owners, but rather to *encourage* responsibility and ensure that the decision to purchase a firearm is made with careful consideration and full awareness of the potential risks. We hope you will vote ought to pass on this important piece of legislation which introduces a temporary delay in firearm acquisition in order to prevent a permanent loss of life via suicide or an act of gun violence.

Sincerely,

Joe Anderson, DO, FAAP

Advocacy Chair, Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

<sup>1</sup> Maine CDC Report to the Legislature pursuant to 22 MRS, Ch. 256-A § 1425