

In-Person and Written Testimony Delivered to Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

4/9/2024

Page 1 of 2

Sheldon Bird, 28 Lemont St., Bath Maine 04530

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and honored members of the Committee, my name is Sheldon Bird, from Bath. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The bill seems to be a reasonable and effective measure to attempt to reduce the carnage wrought by guns in our otherwise peaceful and beautiful State. Innocents are maimed and killed constantly because reasonable reform measures are not being taken. Others have eloquently described what 2283 would do, and I won't repeat.

My case is based on some broad values that I hope to connect with you on.

At 72, I have a perspective that goes back at least fifty years. I have watched as the number of guns has increased and emotions surrounding gun ownership have risen from room temperature to full boil. There has been a commensurate rise in gun violence all along.

I include a citation in my written testimony to an article in the NEJM that shows that as of 2020, firearm injuries have eclipsed vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death among children and adolescents. **THIS HAPPENS NOWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD!** And our lawmakers have done almost nothing about it.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released updated official mortality data that showed 45,222 firearm-related deaths in the United States in 2020 — a new peak.¹ Although previous analyses have shown increases in firearm-related mortality in recent years (2015 to 2019), as compared with the relatively stable rates from earlier years (1999 to 2014),^{2,3} these new data show a sharp 13.5% increase in the crude rate of firearm-related death from 2019 to 2020.¹ This change was driven largely by firearm homicides, which saw a 33.4% increase in the crude rate from 2019 to 2020, whereas the crude rate of firearm suicides increased by 1.1%.¹

Given that firearm homicides disproportionately affect younger people in the United States,³ these data call for an update to the findings of Cunningham et al. regarding the leading causes of death among U.S. children and adolescents. The previous analysis, which examined data through 2016, showed that firearm-related injuries were second only to motor vehicle crashes (both traffic-related and non-traffic-related) as the leading cause of death among children and adolescents, defined as persons 1 to 19 years of age.⁴ Since 2016, that gap has narrowed, and in 2020, firearm-related injuries became the leading cause of death in that age group. From 2019 to 2020, the relative increase in the rate of firearm-related deaths of all types (suicide, homicide, unintentional, and undetermined) among children and adolescents was 29.5% — more than twice as high as the relative increase in the general population. The increase was seen across most demographic characteristics and types of firearm-related deaths.”

(New England Journal of Medicine, 4/20/2022

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>)

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Page 2 of 2

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The basic opening argument against any type of firearm restriction goes like, "*Guns don't kill people, people kill people.*" This is specious at best and fraudulent at worst. If it were valid, then we would have no higher death rate than any other civilized country. Guns are a unique factor in the US's violence equation.

Democracy at its heart is a means of balancing the rights of individuals and communities. Since our nation's birth, we have seen this at work with speech, property, and business. But not firearms. Why? I mean this not as a rhetorical question, but one for debate. It's NEVER the right time to work together! Every time there's a mass shooting and a cry to do something, politicians and pundits go to work instilling fear, so gun and ammo sales soar. It's JUST SO EASY TO DO! It gets votes.

Those who oppose gun measures speak of freedom. IS IT FREEDOM to fear sending children to school, going to a show or a bar or a church? Is that freedom less important than protecting the right of a known imminently dangerous person to possess a firearm? What do we want to be in America? What does your *conscience* tell you? I call on you all, and on the Maine Legislature, to **DO THE RIGHT THING!**

Thank you.