

Public Testimony for hearing - LD2283

James LaPlante

South Portland, Maine

Thank you for holding these hearings today.

My name is James LaPlante I am a citizen of South Portland.

**And I am testifying in support of LD 2238.**

In September of 2020 my brother Stephen took his own life by shooting himself in the head with a handgun. As terrible as that was, it could have turned out much worse.

My bother had been struggling with bipolar schizophrenia for more than a decade. He was hospitalized many times – each hospitalization voluntary and each one too short and ineffective at really helping him.

In 2019 my brother started to amass a collection of guns and ammo. When the pandemic hit my brothers, paranoia grew more intense. He was convinced that people were spreading rumors about him in town. At the convenient store down the road, at the grocery store and the local pizza place. The same kind of rumors that Robert Card thought people were spreading about him before his mass shooting in Lewiston.

My brother could have become a mass shooter. He had several weapons, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and several fully loaded high-capacity magazines. He was living with my mother and I was terrified for her safety and for my family's safety. But there was little I felt could do.

When I consulted with the police, I was told there is not much they can do until he commits a crime. The police had been to the property before in response to complaints about gunfire on the property. All they could do was talk to him about safety and being mindful of the noise. My brother could be a charming person and knew how to talk to police to keep them off his case.

I looked into Maine's Yellow flag law and what it would take to use it. I read other's accounts of the law failing them and how hard it was to find a psychiatrist willing to make a diagnosis. I thought about the risks I would take if my brother was released and had his guns returned. Would we end up part of the conspiracy against him. Would we end up targets of his arsenal.

I was placed in an untenable situation

LD2238 would have given me a much more effective option to remove my brothers guns from him that Maine's current yellow flag does not. Removing those guns could have saved his life and prevented a possible mass shooting. But it is also important to close Maine's private sale loop holes. I would not feel safe using a red flag law if I knew there are other ways for my brother to replace his guns with new ones by private sale. We need background checks for any and all firearms purchases.

Thank you for listening to our concerns and drafting a better red flag law to help protect us and our loved ones. I ask you to pass this legislation and to continue to strengthen Maine gun laws.

Thank you.