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THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

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*Testimony of Senate Majority Leader Teresa S. Pierce introducing*  
**LD 695, An Act Regarding the Laws of the State of Maine**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government*  
*February 18, 2026*

Good morning, Chair Baldacci, Chair Salisbury and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Teresa Pierce. I am proud to represent Senate District 25, which includes Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, most of Yarmouth, Gray and Long Island. In addition, I have the honor of serving as the Senate Majority Leader. Thank you for the opportunity to present **LD 695, "An Act Regarding the Laws of the State of Maine."**

My testimony and the article attached is focused on the Sponsor's Amendment. I would also recommend changing the title to "An Act to Improve Safety in Public Service."

Since 2023, the number of threats against Maine lawmakers — Republicans, Democrats and Independents — nearly tripled, according to the Maine Capitol Police. This increase has left lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, their families and loved ones feeling uneasy and making some reconsider their decision to serve.

It is incumbent upon us as lawmakers and community leaders, regardless of party or creed, to reject political violence, recommit to respectful debate, uphold American values and recognize one another as fellow citizens. LD 695 proposes a meaningful effort towards this goal by creating a fund that legislators can apply for to install home security systems.

As drafted, LD 695 would charge the Office of the Executive Director of the Legislature to administer the program in accordance with policies and procedures established by the Legislative Council and in the manner determined by the Executive Director. The Legislative Council would then select, through a competitive bidding process, licensed and qualified security professionals to provide home security systems in accordance with the policies and procedures established by the Legislative Council.

The Legislator Residential Security Fund account, administered by the Legislative Council, would be used for home security systems. When a member's legislative service has concluded, the Legislative Council may not expend funds from the Legislator Residential Security Fund for service fees associated with monitoring or maintaining that former legislator's home security system.

I appreciate the opportunity to present this bill and to bring member security to the forefront. While this one measure will not solve the issue of political violence, my hope is that it will give meaningful peace of mind to those serving their communities. I urge you to support this bill and would be happy to answer any questions.



Aug 5, 2025

## **TRACKER LEAD: At NCSL, lawmakers warned about polarization, political violence**

**BY CHRIS LISINSKI**

**LA**

BOSTON — A national summit of state lawmakers from around the country opened Monday with a somber tone as hosts reflected on the June assassination of Minnesota Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and cautioned about the growing threat of political polarization.

Legislative leaders from Minnesota paid tribute to Hortman as a beacon of leadership who was unafraid to reach across the aisle, and they urged attendees to honor her by working to counteract increasingly inflammatory political rhetoric.

The topic became a consistent theme throughout the opening session of the three-day National Conference of State Legislatures annual summit. Elected officials from several other states, including those controlled by both Republicans and Democrats, urged their counterparts to resist divisiveness and find common ground.

Minnesota House Speaker Lisa Demuth, a Republican, recalled that when she was first elected minority leader in 2023, then-speaker Hortman — whose Democratic-Farm-Labor Party at that point held a majority in the House — reached out quickly and offered to set up a recurring weekly meeting.

"She didn't have to do that. She had all of the votes that she needed, and she could have easily dismissed me as just another member of the minority party. Other leaders would have," Demuth said. "But Melissa's brand of leadership brought people in instead of shutting them out."

"Melissa showed me that true leadership doesn't stop at party lines," she added. "As we continue to mourn the loss of Minnesota's most impactful public servants, I hope we can all live out the lesson that she taught us."

Hortman and her husband, Mark, died in a June 14 shooting at their home. Prosecutors allege that 57-year-old Vance Boelter, while impersonating a police officer, targeted them as part of a list of politically motivated targets and that he attempted to stop at the homes of two other lawmakers.

Boelter also allegedly shot Minnesota Sen. John Hoffman, a member of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, and his wife, Yvette, who are recovering.

Hoffman, who has been released from the hospital, addressed the NCSL crowd via a prerecorded video message. He called on his counterparts to "leave Boston with one shared resolve: to rise above the noise, to work in the light, and to never forget that public service is about the public, not ourselves."

"In this climate, we must recommit ourselves to governance over grievance, to service over self, and to action over anger," Hoffman said. "Terror in the night isn't legislative reform, and it's repulsive. Showing up at somebody's door in the dark, pounding, screaming, with a gun, impersonating law enforcement, is not a strategy for positive change. It's intimidation, it's violence, and it has no place in a healthy democracy."

Minnesota Senate Majority Leader Erin Murphy, a member of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, described watching "in real time as false narratives laying political blame were built on social media" on the day of the attacks.

"I've heard many suggest that in response to the evil that visited us, we should turn down the vitriol in our rhetoric. I think a lot of America would appreciate that. I know Melissa would," Murphy said. "But as public leaders, we need to go deeper to understand how persistent, dehumanizing narratives and conspiracy theories in public discourse are serving movements and fueling the radicalization of individuals."

Hosts played a video tribute to the Hortmans, casting an emotional pall over the packed Grand Ballroom at the Thomas M. Menino Convention & Exhibition Center. Several audience members could be seen wiping away tears.

Utah Senate President Pro Tempore Wayne Harper, a Republican and the current president of NCSL, called the attacks "un-American" and an act of "depravity."

While a parade of speakers at the summit's opening session all called for a calmer political tone, they gestured at a variety of potential underlying causes.

Murphy warned about the specter of conspiracy theories. Political commentator and radio host Michael Smerconish said a "mental health crisis" and a "polarized media" have played key roles in the degradation of decorum. And Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, a Republican, said he believes "people in the middle" are underrepresented.

Vos recalled facing a "pretty competitive primary" for reelection last year.

"I was up 40 points when I started the race, and my pollster said, 'I think you're going to lose.' I said, 'What do you mean? Look at this polling result.' He said, 'You're just not angry enough as a person, Robin. You need to figure out how, when you wake up in the morning, you look in the mirror and you ask yourself, What are you mad about? Because that's where a lot of people in the world are, especially those who are the most engaged,'" Vos said during a discussion with Smerconish. "So we have to figure [out] a way to say to those who are most engaged, 'It's OK to be passionate. Frankly, I hope more people would be, but it's not OK to be angry at everything that you disagree with.'"

Fourteen years after she survived being shot in the head during an assassination attempt, former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords told the crowd of thousands of

state lawmakers, aides, lobbyists and others that she has had a long road to recovery.

"I'm relearning so many things: how to walk, how to talk, and I'm fighting to make the country safer," Giffords, who became one of the country's best-known gun safety advocates after she left Congress, said. "It can be so difficult. Losses hurt, setbacks are hard, but I tell myself: Move ahead.

"A better world is 'possible,' but change doesn't happen overnight, and we can't do it alone," she added.

The top two Democrats in the Massachusetts Legislature, House Speaker Ron Mariano and Senate President Karen Spilka, also had camaraderie on their mind while welcoming attendees to Boston.

Spilka said in an interview afterward that the conference produces "wonderful conversations with my colleagues from across the country, whether they be representatives or senators, Democrats or Republicans."

"We all are here doing what we're doing for the same mission, the same purpose," she said.

Mariano said the summit will provide a chance "for folks from across the political spectrum to come together."

"I actually had dinner last night with a Republican," he quipped from the ballroom stage. "In Massachusetts, that makes news."

***State Affairs reporter Sam Drysdale contributed to this story.***

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