

Maine gun safety COALITION

March 17, 2017

Our Mission

Maine Gun Safety Coalition promotes responsible gun ownership in order to create a safer Maine.

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Senator Rosen, Representative Warren, distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Nick Wilson and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition to LD 9.

Let me begin by saying that the Maine Gun Safety Coalition is not here to advocate for the creation of a registry of law-abiding firearm owners. As a gun owner, and a representative of a board of directors and membership that include many hunters, military veterans, law enforcement, and other responsible gun owners – we support the Second Amendment and celebrate Maine's long tradition of sportsmanship.

At the national level, there is no comprehensive national system of gun registration. In fact, federal law prohibits using the background check system to create any system of registration of firearms or firearm owners. Currently, only Hawaii and the District of Columbia have registries of law-abiding gun owners. The Maine Gun Safety Coalition is not aware of any efforts to create such a registry in Maine, and I believe it is safe to say that Maine will not be joining Hawaii and DC in creating a gun owner registry in the foreseeable future.

While we are not advocating for a registry of law-abiding firearm owners, we cannot support this bill in its current form. Maine public safety and wildlife agencies maintain numerous firearm-related lists, many of which help Maine citizens exercise their Second Amendment rights. For example, the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife issues hunting licenses and must maintain multiple lists of permits and licenses. Currently, the Department of Public Safety maintains a list of people who have been issued a permit to carry a black powder firearm despite being prohibited from possessing a firearm as a result of a felony conviction. The Maine State Police issues thousands of concealed handgun permits each year.

The broad language in this bill will have dangerous, unintended consequences. For example, it will make it difficult for law enforcement to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers who are prohibited under state and federal law from possessing firearms. It will also make it more difficult for law enforcement to track stolen guns, comply with court orders, and accept the voluntary surrender of a firearm by its owner.

Several other states have enacted laws prohibiting a firearm owner registry, but the statutes are often more specific and contain important exceptions. For example, Pennsylvania prohibits a registry of long guns, but exempts handguns because they are more likely to be used in violent crimes. I've enclosed a copy of Florida's statute as an example of a bill with the same goal as this one, but it has nearly three pages of exemptions. Florida's statute reflects the reality that certain lists are sometimes necessary for our criminal justice system to do its job and protect our communities. We recommend that the bill language be redrafted to focus exclusively on the issue the sponsors are trying to address, rather than unnecessarily tying the hands of our brave public servants who share our desire to create a safer Maine.

Sincerely,
Nick Wilson
Executive Director, Maine Gun Safety Coalition