

Testimony in Support of LD 759

April 20, 2021

LD 759 is a child safety bill. It is about protecting children from the harm they may do to themselves or others with a gun. This law makes clear the danger of an unsecured loaded gun in a child's hands and place the responsibility where it belongs—with the adult. I will put a human face on this bill by talking about a specific instance where a child's death could have been prevented had the parents secured their guns.

In 1994 I was hired by the Lisbon School Department to teach art to the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade children at Sugg Middle School. That same summer, my husband Jon was hired to teach English at Lisbon High. Looking back, it must have been the summer of 1995 or '96 because the school year had not yet begun. Jon and I learned that an eighth-grade girl I had taught at Sugg had killed herself with her father's gun.

This girl whose name I cannot recall—she must have been fourteen or fifteen at the oldest-- was on my husband's roster for Freshman English but Jon never got to meet her. We were both in shock and I have never forgotten her. Although I can't remember her name, this girl, this child was a real person. I ask you right now to take a moment and think about her. If she had lived, this girl would now be in her forties. Let's pause and let that settle in. I can just barely recall her face. Her sullen facial expression and withdrawn personality suggested she was a very unhappy child. No doubt she must have been in a great deal of emotional pain.

My friend Marsha Crouse taught sixth grade at Sugg Middle School at that time. She remembers this girl and in particular, she shared with me her recollection of an emergency meeting held on her behalf. At that meeting, Marsha related that the mother was told just how vulnerable her daughter was. "We told her to get all firearms out of the home."

While searching for details about this young girl's suicide by gun in newspaper archives, I came across this headline from 2017: "Authorities: Girl, 5, picked up dad's gun and shot self in head.

SCARBOROUGH (AP)" The article reads:

" An autopsy shows the shooting death of a 5-yearold Maine girl at her grandparents' home was accidental: The girl had picked up her father's gun and shot herself in the head. The state medical examiner's office reached its conclusion Wednesday following the death of Elise Dorr, of Belfast, two days earlier. Police say the .45-caliber handgun owned by her father, Todd Dorr, was in a backpack in a bedroom. Todd Dorr told police he went to adjust the television and heard the gunshot as he moved across the room. Police say the girl retrieved the gun and was on the bed when the gun went off. The gun wasn't in a holster, and there was no gunlock. No charges have been filed."

<https://www.pressherald.com/2017/08/31/authorities-girl-5-picked-up-dads-gun-and-shot-self-in-head/>

Others who are testifying today will offer the statistics, recounting the number of children killed accidentally by guns in Maine. Each of these lost children was someone's daughter, son, student, grandchild, friend. Children deserve our due diligence and protection. I urge you to do the right thing and vote LD 759 "Ought to Pass." We must do everything possible to keep guns out of the hands of children.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin E. Brooks

47 Ivanhoe Drive

Topsham, Maine 04086