

4/21/2021

RE: Testimony for LD 759: An Act to Amend the Child Endangerment Laws to Include Certain Unauthorized Access to a Loaded Firearm

Senator Deschambault, Senator Warren and members of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee

My name is Lynn Ellis from Brunswick, Maine and I am a proud member of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. We are a grassroots movement of Americans fighting for public safety measures that can protect people from gun violence. We know that gun violence is preventable, and we're committed to doing what it takes to keep families safe. Today I speak in support of LD 759.

This bill would help prevent the tragic deaths and injuries of children in Maine who gain access to a loaded firearm. We know that in Maine 80% of all gun deaths among children under 18 are suicides.<sup>1</sup> Although firm statistics are difficult to find, approximately a dozen children have been impacted this past year, either killing or injuring themselves or a family member by accessing a loaded firearm. We do know that of the 163 deaths involving a firearm this past year, 90% of these are suicides. And then there are the unintentional deaths. Every year in the US nearly 350 children access a loaded gun and unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else.<sup>2</sup> We read about the incidents in Maine like the teenage boy in New Sharon who unintentionally killed himself while talking on zoom with a friend.<sup>3</sup> We know of the child in Waterville who gained access to a gun and unintentionally shot his 2-year-old sibling.<sup>4</sup> All were likely preventable if guns were securely, stored and not accessible.

This bill would help prevent future tragedies by adding a new section to Maine's child endangerment statute. It would make it a crime to leave a loaded firearm in a place the person knows (or should know) a child is likely to access it if the child actually accesses the gun and uses or discharges it. Research shows that secure storage laws, sometimes referred to as child-access prevention laws, can play a vital role in reducing unintentional firearm injuries and deaths among children, as well as firearm self-injuries and suicides among young people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using five years of the most recent available data: 2015 to 2019. Children and teens defined as ages 0 to 17

<sup>2</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "#NotAnAccident Index," <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/>.

<sup>3</sup> "'Horrrific Accident': Maine 16-Year-Old Fatally Shoots Himself During Video Chat," *WBZ*, August 16, 2020, <https://boston.cbslocal.com/2020/08/19/maine-new-sharon-teen-shoots-himself-video-chat/>. See also Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "#NotAnAccident Index," <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/>.

<sup>4</sup> "District Attorney to Review Police Files in Waterville Shooting Case," *Central Maine*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.centralmaine.com/2021/01/21/district-attorney-to-review-police-files-in-waterville-shooting-case/>

<sup>5</sup> Rosanna Smart et al., "The Science of Gun Policy: A Critical Synthesis of Research Evidence on the Effects of Gun Policies in the United States," Second Edition, Chapter 17: Child-Access Prevention Laws, (RAND Corporation, 2020), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2088-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2088-1.html).

With a record number of firearms purchased during the Covid pandemic, the risk of unauthorized child access is greater than it ever has been.<sup>6</sup> Please support the passage of LD 7539 to save the lives of the children in our state by preventing them from gaining access to firearms and doing harm to themselves or others.

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<sup>6</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Undeniable: How Long-Standing Loopholes in the Background Check System Have Been Exacerbated by COVID-19," December 10, 2020, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/background-check-loopholes/>.