

Rebecca Green  
Waterville

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Rebecca Green, and I am a resident of Waterville, an early childhood educator, and I currently represent Ward 4 on the Waterville City Council.

In fact, I represent the Waterville family whose toddler was severely injured when his 5-year-old brother shot him with an unsecured firearm in the home. This was a tragic and preventable accident that LD 759 would seek to redress. I'm providing testimony in support of this bill because of this devastating event. I don't want to wait until another child is wounded or killed. We need to legislate and educate for safe storage practices in the state of Maine.

Currently in Maine there are no requirements that gun owners receive training on either operating or storing a firearm. With the recent surge in firearm sales through the pandemic (background checks rose 69% in 2020), there are more guns in Maine homes, and therefore children who likely have access to these weapons.

It surprised me to learn that Maine has the highest per capita rate of firearm mortalities of any northeastern state except PA. The vast majority (88%) are suicides. In 2019, there were 163 gun deaths in Maine; 10 of them were children and teens. In 2019, a JAMA study identified Maine children with having the highest rates of anxiety and depression in the country. Since the pandemic, we know that mental health issues have risen even further, and attempted suicides with a firearm are much more likely to result in death.

So, we have rising numbers of guns in Maine homes, more children at home during the pandemic, rising levels of anxiety and depression in youth, and no requirements for safe storage of firearms.

I believe that the majority of gun owners intend to be responsible, but the reality is that many people underestimate the ability of children to find unsecured firearms. Children are wired to be curious--as the director of the Kennebec Montessori school for 12 years, I am keenly aware of this. In our classrooms, we assumed that children could and would explore anything they had access to. And we were right. That's how they learned. There's no reason to think that children would be any different at home.

We have to act before another child is wounded or killed. Such incidents have tragic repercussions and costs (emotional, social and economic) not only for individuals and families, but for communities as well.

LD 759 will ensure that the right to own a gun comes with the obligation to store it safely: not in a closet or a high shelf, but in a locked safe or with a cable lock. It is a public safety measure that will demonstrate Maine's commitment to keeping children safe and it will encourage greater awareness and education on responsible safe storage of firearms.

I urge you to support this bill and send a clear message to people in Maine that the safe storage of firearms is a responsibility we ALL have to keeping children safe.