

My name is Cathy Daphna Harris and I am a retired school teacher. Thank you for allowing me to speak today in favor of this bill. When I was 16 years old I was babysitting my neighbor's children one evening. The children were playing in their bedroom, which was right beside their parents bedroom and I was in the kitchen making them a snack. I got the biggest scare of my life when the 5 year old little boy I was watching came into the kitchen with a large black revolver. He actually pointed it right at me and acted like it was a toy. I managed to coax him into giving it to me, although it took some persuasion, and I put it up on a high shelf. When I talked to the parents about this, they were shocked. They had put the gun in a safe in their bedroom but somehow it must not have been locked. The gun was not loaded. I hate to think what could have happened if it was. All these many years later and I still remember the terror I felt when I saw that little boy holding that gun, so huge in his tiny hands. If that gun had been loaded he could have shot me or his brother or even himself.

I taught school for 28 years. I spent most of those years teaching kindergarten. I know how impulsive young children can be. When I was a teacher, I was a mandated reporter for child abuse and neglect. It certainly is neglect if a child is able to have access to a loaded weapon. The child does not know the danger but the adults certainly do. What could possibly constitute more as a case of neglect than leaving a loaded gun unsecure in the presence of a child? I know that in Maine the Department of Health and Human Services has been under scrutiny to protect the children in this state. I believe this bill further addresses safety measures we need to have in place for our children.

My husband is in law enforcement. When he comes home at night the first thing he does is lock up his gun even though we don't have young children in our home. He practices gun safety the way he was trained. Locking up weapons so that children cannot get their hands on them just makes sense and is what responsible gun owners should do. My neighbor was a responsible gun owner. His gun was not loaded. I might not be here today if that had not been the case.