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***Testimony of Rep. Rebecca Millett in support of
LD 759, An Act To Amend the Child Endangerment Laws To Include Certain
Unauthorized Access To a Loaded Firearm
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety***

Good morning Sen. Deschambault, Representative Warren and esteemed members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am Representative Rebecca Millett, and I represent House District 30, the community of Cape Elizabeth in the Maine House of Representatives

I can't express enough how strongly I feel about the worth of **LD 759, An Act To Amend the Child Endangerment Laws To Include Certain Unauthorized Access To A Loaded Firearm**, as both a long serving member of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs and cofounder of our Children's Caucus and current House co-chair. I am honored to be presenting this testimony before you today.

It is no surprise that children are curious creatures - their curiosity is what allows them to explore, learn, and grow. This interest in the enticing objects around them can lead them to easily get a hold of something they shouldn't. We often install child proof cabinet and drawer latches, and place child proof locks on our medicines. We do this because we recognize their endless curiosity and we want to protect our children from danger. Children are attracted to objects just out of their reach, and tragically, there have been countless incidents of children gaining access to a loaded gun this way. The negligent storage of firearms, which can threaten the life of a minor, must have consequences. It is evident that in 2021, action needs to be taken to protect our children from finding out what a gun can do and prevent needless tragedies.

The bill before you concerns the rudimentary safety of children and teens and it addresses a gap in public health. By passing this piece of legislation, it would encourage Maine parents and adults to store their loaded firearms safely in order to protect our youngest citizens.

A new study by the Journal of the American Medical Association found that across the nation, around 7% of adolescents lived in a household with at least one gun that was stored unsafely. In

addition to this, the study discovered that “approaches that will motivate adults who live in homes with youths to store firearms safely may prevent up to 32% of firearm deaths.¹”

“While some data suggests that gun owners with children in the home are slightly more likely than other gun owners to store firearms safely, roughly 4.6 million minors live in homes with loaded, unlocked firearms.”² That’s 4.6 million children at risk of ending the lives of themselves or of another innocent victim. How many of these children live in Maine?

“Studies show that between 70 and 90% of guns used in youth suicides, unintentional shootings among children, and school shootings perpetrated by shooters under the age of 18 are acquired from the home or the homes of relatives or friends.”³ An act such as LD 759 would aid in removing the risk of children and teens accessing loaded firearms as well as preventing such tragedies, like teen suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Maine youth aged 10 to 24, and firearms are the most prevalent method used in teen suicide. This statistic is heartbreaking, as something so simple as the safe storage of loaded firearms may have saved the lives of those who acted impulsively when a weapon was available to them.

Just one harrowing example of a real-life tragedy took place in Waterville. A 2-year-old boy was rushed to the hospital after suffering a gunshot wound to his head. “One of three siblings living in the Western Avenue home apparently found a gun that was secured in a closet, loaded it and fired a round that hit the 2-year-old,”⁴ according to the Bangor Daily News. With the passing of the “An Act To Amend the Child Endangerment Laws To Include Certain Unauthorized Access To A Loaded Firearm,” this calamity and those like it could be avoided.

This legislation is about saving children’s lives just like we do with smoke detectors, seat belts, and car seats. Today, 30 states across the country have implemented a Child Access Prevention law. It is vital that Maine follows suit and moves forward to protect our children. As a community, it is our duty to keep the next generation of Mainers as safe as possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you to pass this important piece of legislation into law.

¹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2733158>

² <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/child-consumer-safety/safe-storage/>

³ <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/child-consumer-safety/child-access-prevention/>

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<https://bangordailynews.com/2021/01/03/news/mid-maine/waterville-2-year-old-in-critical-condition-after-being-shot-in-the-head/>