

Testimony by Maura Pillsbury in Support of LD 759  
An Act to amend the Child Endangerment Laws to Include Certain Unauthorized  
Access to a Loaded Firearm, Sponsored by Rep. Victoria Doudera

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Maura Pillsbury. I am a Moms Demand Action Maine volunteer, a mother of two young children, and I also serve on my local school board. I am here today to testify on behalf of myself and thousands of members of Moms Demand Action Maine across the state in strong support of LD 759.

In Maine, we have seen tragedy after tragedy where children and young people have gotten ahold of loaded guns and harmed themselves or others. Last year, a 16-year-old boy in New Sharon obtained a handgun owned by a family member from a closet in his home, and accidentally shot and killed himself while on video chat with a friend.<sup>1</sup> The trauma of gun violence, whether unintentional or intentional, is deep and long lasting. It touches everyone in the impacted family and in the broader community. Unauthorized child access to a firearm can have permanent and devastating repercussions.

As a member of my local school board, I participate in discussions about how we can protect our schools with bulletproof glass and active shooter drills. But we also need to think about prevention—what we can do to prevent incidents of gun violence from happening in the first place to keep our schools and children safe. The fact is, when children obtain guns they have to get them from somewhere—and that means from an adult gun owner. Requiring secure storage will not only help protect children in their own homes, it can also protect our schools and communities from gun violence.

According to the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), 32% of Maine high school students felt sad or hopeless for at least 2 weeks in the past year, and 16% of Maine high school students had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.<sup>2</sup>

There are many things we must do to address these alarming statistics, but preventing access to guns without adult supervision is one step we can take to protect our youth. Suicide attempts are much more likely to be fatal when a gun is used rather than any other means.<sup>3</sup> Young people are impulsive and do not have the same ability to make responsible decisions as adults. That is why it is our responsibility to protect them through laws like this.

I have heard gun rights advocates and legislators state time and again that Maine is a safe state with responsible gun owners. By and large that may be true, but the repeated, tragic incidents that have occurred in our state show this is not always the case. Just like when we enacted a law requiring seat

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<sup>1</sup> “‘Horror 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>2</sup> “Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey: Maine High School Students, 2019” [https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/files/Snapshot/2019\\_High\\_School\\_StateSnapshot.pdf](https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/files/Snapshot/2019_High_School_StateSnapshot.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Conner, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, “Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014: A Nationwide Population-Based Study,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 171, no. 2 (2019): 885–95, <https://doi.org/10.7326/M19-1324>.

belts, we need a law to encourage a behavior shift so every single gun owner is proactively thinking about how their guns are stored around children and taking steps to prevent children's access to them without their knowledge.

Research shows that secure storage laws can play a vital role in reducing unintentional firearm injuries and deaths among children, as well as firearm self-injuries and firearm suicides among young people.<sup>4</sup> (<https://www.everytown.org/solutions/responsible-gun-storage/>) Twenty other states have child access prevention or secure storage laws to protect children from incidents like this. As a state with a high rate of gun ownership, this bill is all the more crucial here in Maine. Please vote Ought to Pass on LD 759 to protect our children and communities from gun violence. Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Unload, Lock, and Separate: Secure Storage Practices to Reduce Gun Violence," September 3, 2019, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/unload-lock-and-separate-secure-storage-practices-to-reduce-gun-violence/>