

Testimony in Support of LD 759, "An Act To Amend the Child Endangerment Laws to Include Certain Unauthorized Access to a Loaded Firearm"

My name is Sue Repko, from Eliot, Maine, and I am a teacher, urban planner, gun owner, and volunteer with Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. Thank you, Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and the Committee for the chance to testify today.

Whenever I hear about an unintentional shooting involving children, my heart breaks. In an instant, a child has been seriously injured or killed. All the joy they've brought to the world, all their potential – now limited or gone altogether. Then I think about the child who was holding the gun. It's terrible to say, but they are marked forever, even though they never asked for this. Then there's the gun owner, who will forever have to live with the fact that they had a choice and did not choose the safety of those children as their top priority. And then I think about the shame, judgment and "what if's" that come with all these stories, and I feel like I'm 12 years old again.

That's when my father unintentionally shot our next-door neighbor. My dad ran a part-time gunsmithing business out of a garage in our backyard in a residential neighborhood in Pennsylvania. I was outside playing one Sunday night in May 1975 when I heard a pop-pop come from the garage; Dad often test-fired in there. But this time one of the rounds pierced a window, went across our neighbor's driveway and into his garage, striking him in the abdomen, nicking his pancreas and liver and going out through his back. He crawled out, moaning, and I watched my dad cry over his prone body. Mr. Landes died a couple days later.

It was in the paper 3 days in a row. That's how I first learned about zoning approvals, variances, special exceptions. My dad had none. That's how I learned test-firing was illegal. The zoning officer had never cited him despite complaints from neighbors; the police had brought their guns to him. My dad made the wrong choices, and local government looked the other way.

I was suddenly totally ashamed of my dad. Neighborhood kids taunted my younger siblings with, "Killer's kids!" and "At least my dad never killed anyone!" You can be sure that the child holding the gun will not be immune from similar taunts. But with LD 759, we can raise awareness about the need for safe storage and protect children from ever being in that position.

Testimony in Support of LD 759, "An Act To Amend the Child Endangerment Laws to Include Certain Unauthorized Access to a Loaded Firearm"

Responsible gun owners make us all safer by storing firearms unloaded and locked, with ammunition separate. Research shows that child-access prevention laws play a vital role in reducing unintentional firearm injuries and deaths among children. Why would we not pass such a law to protect Maine children? Why would we not try to spare our communities from the enduring psychological trauma of this particular kind of shooting? I urge you not to look the other way. Fourteen states have passed this type of responsible storage law. Six other states and DC have broader responsible storage laws aimed at preventing access to firearms by children and others. I urge Maine to join them and pass LD 759.