

4/21/21

Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

RE:Testimony for LD 759: An Act To Amend the Child Endangerment Laws To Include Certain Unauthorized Access to a Loaded Firearm

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Sarah Staffiere. I live in Waterville and am a mom to two children, a seven year old son and four year old daughter. I am a volunteer with Moms Demand Action and the Show Up Now (SUN) Network. I am here to testify in favor of LD 759.

I think we can all agree that one of our greatest responsibilities in life is caring for and raising children. I believe this responsibility extends beyond the individual parents and home to include the efforts of our state leaders, such as all of you on this committee, to draft and pass laws that foster safe and healthy communities for our children. This bill will offer a level of safety that is missing from Maine's legislation. With rights come great responsibilities, safely storing firearms is a simple common sense act. LD 759 is a common sense measure that we can easily agree on: Loaded firearms should never be accessible to children. Allowing this to happen is negligent, dangerous, and should certainly be illegal.

My own town Waterville has experienced a disturbing number of gun tragedies and accidents in just the last few years. Most recently, a neighbor's two year old child was accidentally shot in the head by his brother, a child the same age as my son. This news certainly shook me but it has also motivated me as a parent to come here today to speak openly to you about how concerned I am about gun safe storage.

To be clear though, these concerns are not new to me. I have had panicked thoughts about dropping my child off at a friend's house to play- what if there is a gun within reach? Before my children enter any home, my husband and I always ask if all firearms are secured. But that doesn't feel like enough. I have talked to both my son and daughter many, many times about what they would and should do if they encounter a gun. My son always gives the perfect answer now: "Never touch the gun, run away, and tell an adult. I know, Mom." This response allows me to exhale in relief for a moment, but I always go back to questioning how this coaching would translate if Gabriel or Natalie were given an actual opportunity to hold an unsecured weapon.

Studies confirm my worst fears: No matter the amount of education a child receives on gun safety, most children would be curious enough to handle a firearm. In a study published in *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*¹, researchers found that when young children are unsupervised, they frequently touch and play with real guns, even after receiving clear and specific instructions not to do so. It is painfully obvious that the responsibility is on us as adults to prevent the child's encounter with the weapon in the first place. LD 759 does just that by ensuring that safe storage guidelines of loaded firearms are put in place here in Maine.

Thank you,

Sarah Staffiere

¹M.S. Hardy, F.D. Armstrong, B.L. Martin, and K.N. Strawn.1996. "A firearm safety program for children: They just can't say no," *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 17(4):216-221.