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Senator Deschambeault, Representative Warren, members of the Committee for Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

I am Dr Susan Talbot and I have practiced and taught primary care pediatrics for 35 years in the State of Maine and I am writing you in huge support of LD 759, the Safe Gun Storage Bill. First I want to thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

I am certain you have heard all of the statistics in support of this bill like:

4.6 million children reside in homes with at least one loaded, improperly stored firearm
About 3 out of 4 of children know where firearms are kept in their home
Increased rates of older children suicides and their success with firearms
There has been a 20% increase in childhood forearm injuries in 2020

This last statistic is most likely due in part to the marked increase in firearms purchased in 2020, both nationally and in the State of Maine, many by first time gun owners for personal protection, who can leave the store without any knowledge of how to use or store their newly purchased firearm.

3 things could help to change the culture of behavior around the storage of firearms, just as it did around the wearing of car seat belts: THE LAW, EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY

LAW: The requirement to wear car seat law(s) is a prime example of a law for a public safety measure, especially for the safety of our children, that helped to markedly increase seat belt usage from 11% in 1980 to about 85% in 2007 and 88% in 2019 which greatly reduced motor vehicle death rates by 45% and MV serious injury by 55%. It didn't become law to wear seats belts in this state until 1997, about 30 years after seatbelts were introduced and think of how many more lives we would have saved and serious injuries we could have prevented if only enacted sooner. I, as one of the 89% who didn't wear a seat belt until I was, as a physician, called to the emergency room to help care for the victims of a 4 person car accident. All were unbelted, one child died, her mother lost her spleen, but more importantly her mother and father lost her, one of their daughters. I have been wearing seat belt ever since, but this is not the way people should learn to behave responsibly. In 1972 there were 250 car fatalities and after the laws for seat belts were passed, down to 157 fatalities in 2019, still too high, but with more vehicle on the roads. That is an impressive reduction!!! This change wasn't mostly due to the law enforcement of the seat belt laws, but because the law became known, some through law enforcement, but much more through advertising such as BUCKLE UP...IT'S THE LAW on TV, road signs, and newspapers, pamphlets and community programs and physicians' endorsement and counseling. A whole culture was changed and more through the development of the normalcy of their use and the safety it provided and not the infringement on personal freedoms. So why not LOCK IT (firearms) UP ...IT'S THE LAW campaign, where there is no infringement on the right to bear arms, but the responsibility to keep especially our children safe becomes the norm

EDUCATION: I would guess almost nobody, perhaps not even the State legislators, knew the full content of the Child Endangerment Laws until LD 759 was being seriously assessed, probably because it was never really under the general public scrutiny and it doesn't go near far enough to delineate gun owners responsibility for public and children/s safety with proper safe gun storage. If LD 759 is passed it will have the publicity it deserves and even firearm retail sellers like LL Bean and Cabelas will be more apt to discuss with their clients how to store their arms more safely and purchasers will listen and change behavior. Again this can happen in communities, among law officials, with gun clubs and in doctors offices.

TECHNOLOGY: Just as seat belt technology improved for comfort and efficacy, lock boxes have done the same as have other methods of safe storage, making them both easier to use, but also safer. This too can encourage all gun owners, as some certainly already do store their firearms safely, to do likewise.

Mainers have the right to bear arms, but with that comes the responsibility for the safety of our communities and especially of our children. Just as the public safety laws for seat belts and car seats and in-ground pool fences decreased death for our children, so will LD 759 to store firearms safely. I ask you and your colleagues to please one yes for LD 759. Thank you. Sincerely Susan Talbot, MD