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Testimony of Rep. Sam Zager 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**

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and other honorable committee members, I am Sam Zager and I represent District 41 in Portland. I am here today to testify as a cosponsor of this bill. To be clear, it would not restrict a person's constitutional right to have or use a firearm; rather, it is about exercising that right judiciously and safely.

As a physician, I wish that there were no need for LD 759; I wish there were no fatalities in Maine due to accidental discharge of firearms. But there are, so we must do what we can to drive it as close to zero as possible.

Accidents are the number one cause of death among children. If we want to take the death of children or adults by firearm accidents seriously, then we would want to take reasonable steps in that direction. LD 759 does that by addressing *stewardship* and *safety*.

In the military, we learned over and over again that minimizing fatal accidents required having a *culture of safety*. For instance, military law, standing orders, and procedures constantly reinforced the message that we had to be ardent stewards of firearms and ammunition.

A vote in favor of this bill could contribute to the *culture of safe gun ownership* in Maine. Some people might say that Maine is already a safe state for firearms. And I am grateful to every fellow Mainer who safely keeps firearms--though one-quarter of parents in gun-

owning households don't even know that their child handled a gun in their house.¹ I also would point out that even though the United States military has an excellent record of firearm safety, it still painstakingly emphasizes it. Maintaining a *culture of safety* requires constant vigilance.

This bill is not merely a qualitative step though. Rigorous quantitative research suggests it makes sense. One study found that in 82% of youth firearm suicides, the weapon was owned by a parent or other relative.² A group of biostatisticians estimated that a law like LD 759 would reduce youth suicide and unintentional death by up to 32%.³ A 2019 study found that legislation indeed can make children safer.⁴ It was a study of over 21,000 children who died by a firearm during a five-year period. States with stricter gun laws had lower pediatric firearm-related death rates.

Fewer children dying by firearm-- isn't that what we all want?

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration. I'd be happy to take any questions.

¹ Frances Baxley and Matthew Miller, "Parental Misperceptions About Children and Firearms," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 160, no. 5 (2006): 542–547.

² Renee M. Johnson, et al., "Who Are the Owners of Firearms Used in Adolescent Suicides?," *Suicide and Life-threatening Behavior* 40, no. 6 (2010): 609-611

³ Michael C. Monuteaux, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, "Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage With Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death Among US Youths," *JAMA Pediatrics* (2019)

⁴ Goyal MK, Badolato GM et al, State Gun Laws and Pediatric Firearm-Related Mortality, *Pediatrics* August 2019, 144 (2) e20183283; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-3283>