

Sen. Deschambeault, Rep Warren and members of the committee: My name is Nacole Palmer and I live in Bowdoin.

When I was in seventh grade, my only friend in a school where I was the new girl was Jennifer Reed. Jennifer was kind and thoughtful in an environment that was decidedly unwelcoming. In the Spring of that 7th grade year, Jennifer was kidnapped, assaulted, and murdered. There was no investigation, there were no news stories, and the perpetrators were obviously never caught. Even though I was pretty young, I knew then that if something like that had happened to a 13 year old white girl--like me--it would have been on every news station every night until the bastards were caught. But because Jennifer was black, no one who had the power to do anything about it cared.

I am telling you this story because it illustrates something I learned in quite a brutal way at that young age, and that is that the rules for people who live their lives in black skin are very different from the rules for people who live their lives in white skin. And that even when the rules are technically the same, they are applied very differently.

I won't mince words here. Stand Your Ground Bills are, at their core, a means for justifying the murder of black people, who are deemed "threatening" by their mere existence. Study after study shows that this law's application is undeniably racist. In Stand Your Ground states, homicides involving a White shooter and Black victim were ruled justified in 45% of cases, but in cases involving a Black shooter and White victim, just 11% of homicides were ruled justified.¹²

And yet, the "Stand Your Ground" bill has been pushed nationwide by the NRA as a top priority because, let's face it, the NRA wants to keep making money. They don't care that in states that pass these bills, homicides go UP, not down.

Removing the requirement to attempt de-escalation and retreat does not make us safer. It encourages the kind of rampant vigilante-ism that we have seen splashed across headlines for years now in the completely unnecessary murders of 17 yr old Trayvon Martin, who went to the corner store to get skittles, 17 yr old Jordan Davis, who played music too loudly in the opinion of his white murderer, and Ahmaud Arbery, who was chased, hunted, and killed while jogging...because, you know, black men who run look "suspicious" to racist wannabe cops. This law, the Stand Your Ground Law, which has been used as a defense for all of those murders, is not a tool of justice; it is a tool that deepens the disparities of an already racially flawed legal system, and it is used disproportionately to justify deadly violence by people who are white against people who are not.

¹ US Commission on Civil Rights, "Examining the Race Effects of Stand Your Ground Laws and Related Issues," Statement of Commissioner Michael Yaki, February 2020, 17 (citing John K. Roman, Ph.D., "Race, Justifiable Homicide, and Stand Your Ground Laws: Analysis of FBI Supplementary Homicide Report Data," The Urban Institute, (2013): 9).

² <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/22Stand-Your-Ground22-Kills-How-These-NRA-Backed-Laws-Promote-Racist-Violence.pdf>

This tool of modern day lynching has no place in Maine. And the Criminal Justice Committee should not be in the business of worsening the toll that black and brown bodies must face in a world that already applies different rules to them. Vote "ought not to pass" to move our society toward, and not away from, actual Justice for All. Thank you.