

4/26/2021

Testimony of Maura Pillsbury in Opposition to LD 1138 –
An Act To Ensure the Right to Self-defense Exists outside the Home by Removing the
Requirement To Retreat, Sponsored by Rep. John Andrews

Good morning Sen. Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Maura Pillsbury. I am a volunteer with the ME Chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and a resident of Freeport. I am testifying in opposition to LD 1138.

While proponents of Stand Your Ground laws claim that such laws merely remove ambiguity from the law, these laws dramatically and dangerously change the laws of self-defense in a state, encouraging escalations of violence and the use of deadly force even in cases where there's a clear and safe alternative. These laws encourage people to shoot first even in cases where it's not necessary to do so. Traditional self-defense law gives people the right to protect themselves, but also recognizes that it's always best to avoid killing someone if possible. Current Maine law codifies that common-sense, long-standing approach by requiring people outside their homes to refrain from using deadly force if they can safely walk away from a confrontation. LD 1138 and Stand Your Ground laws like it upend traditional self-defense by allowing people to shoot and kill in public, even when they can safely walk away from the danger.

This effort to rewrite Maine's existing self-defense law and put in place LD 1138's dangerous stand your ground language is not about self-defense and would do nothing to deter crime. In fact, this change in the law would jeopardize the safety of Mainers. Stand Your Ground laws are actually associated with clear increases in homicides, too often perpetrated by those who already have violent backgrounds.¹ This bill would codify in law the principle to 'shoot first, ask questions later', and give bad actors a license to unnecessarily use lethal violence. This policy has especially devastating impacts on communities of color. In Stand Your Ground states, homicides in which white shooters kill Black victims are deemed justifiable five times more frequently than when the situation is reversed.

It is alarming to see legislation come up here in Maine that weakens existing common sense gun safety laws. Responsible gun owners see the need for reasonable gun laws and regulations. This Stand Your Ground law would open the door to unnecessarily and recklessly using deadly force in circumstances where there are clear alternatives to a violent response.

There is no evidence suggesting that current self-defense laws--which strike an appropriate balance between reasonable self-defense and avoiding needless killings--are not protecting public safety here in Maine. As is often stated this is a bad solution in search of a problem, and would threaten public safety and encourage armed vigilantism.

On behalf of thousands of Moms Demand Action members across our state, I urge you to oppose LD 1138. Thank you.

[1] Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Stand Your Ground Laws Are A License to Kill," January 2021, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/stand-your-ground-laws-are-a-license-to-kill/>.