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Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Hillary Shende, and I am a concerned citizen from Brunswick. Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

I'd like to start by calling attention to the origin of this bill and similar Stand Your Ground laws in other states. They are being pushed by the NRA to accomplish one goal: to manipulate the emotions of the citizenry to buy more guns. They started off in Florida in 2005 and were called, I kid you not, "True Man" laws. They are clearly designed to tap into old fashioned notions of "manliness" by granting immunity to people who want to play cops and robbers without any requirement that they possess even the slightest level of competence with a weapon. With the promise of immunity and the false narrative of threats — that crime is around every corner and we must be ready to shoot anyone we perceive as threatening at a moment's notice — people buy more guns! And the NRA is happy because the NRA's primary goal is to increase profits for gun manufacturers, not promote safe hunting and storage practices like they did decades ago.

And so what happens when these bills are enacted? Does public safety increase? No! It goes DOWN. The only things that go up, besides the amount of money in Smith and Wesson's pocket, are the number of gun deaths, gun injuries, hospitalizations, and costs associated with health care and legal wranglings that accompany each new gun death or injury. And who pays for that? You and me, the taxpayers. All so that gun manufacturers can make more money. This is NOT a good deal for Mainers, not even close.

And it's an even worse deal for Mainers of Color, who will disproportionately suffer, as the U.S. Department of Justice concluded in its February 2020 report. Mainers of color like my husband and children, who are more likely to be misperceived as a threat, simply because of the color of their skin.

Governor Mills just signed into law that beginning in 2022, our legislature will spell out the racial impact of each new law it passes, presumably because we have overwhelmingly agreed as a state that we don't want to pass racist laws. Your committee has tremendous power to show whether that's actually true. Rejecting this racist Stand Your Ground bill will go a long way to show that you really meant it.

Finally, this bill isn't even needed because if you are truly in a life threatening situation out in public, and you cannot escape — which is incredibly rare in Maine in the first place — our self-defense law is already on your side if you need to use lethal force.

This is another one of those no-brainer decisions. With no upside and many horrible downsides, rejecting this bill is the only sensible thing to do. Thank you.