



March 27th, 2023

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee:

My name is Kelli McCannell, and I am the Executive Director with Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights (GRR!), an education and advocacy organization led by grandmothers and elders dedicated to advancing reproductive health, rights and justice for present and future generations. GRR! was founded in Maine in 2013 and currently engages over 500 Maine activists in our work. I'm here to testify on behalf of GRR! in opposition to **LD 761: *An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Crime of Endangering the Welfare of a Child and to Create the Crime of Aggravated Endangering the Welfare of a Child.***

Our organization is committed to ending the criminalization of pregnancy and all of its outcomes, as well as uplifting the Reproductive Justice movement's principles of providing all parents with the *power and resources* to raise children in safe, healthy & sustainable environments. It is from this values-based framework that we call on you to reject LD 761.

We, like all of you, want Maine children to experience safety. Unfortunately, LD 761 seeks to add punishment to tragic situations, rather than prevent harm in the first place or provide healing resources and care in the aftermath of the serious injury or death of a child. We believe safety for children fundamentally requires resourcing and supporting parents, especially the most economically and socially vulnerable heads of households, which are often poor mothers and poor mothers of color.

GRR! believes compassionate and common sense policies that center justice for vulnerable communities must guide the steps we take to make Maine a safe place for all children. A compassionate and common sense posture toward legislating in this arena would assume that all parents and guardians want to do their best for the children in their care, and would acknowledge that we do not all meet the numerous challenges of child rearing with the same economic and social resources at our disposal.

Poverty is one of the greatest threats to children's safety and ability to thrive. Poverty can make leaving domestic violence situations intimidating and even impossible for many, even if a parent recognizes the danger themselves and their children are in and is motivated to act. Poverty and resulting lack of access to healthcare services, including mental health and substance use treatment, also contribute to tragic situations wherein children of loving and well-meaning parents are harmed or die.



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Poverty and other forms of systemic oppression foster a culture of reckless endangerment, and we thus ask our elected representatives to take up the numerous public policy recommendations put forth by the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations, especially those derived from the report created out of LD 1113.

Criminalizing parents following the brutal loss of their children will not keep any of us safer. It will not bring any children back to us. Criminalization is not accountability. Instead, we as a collective can work to pass policies that end the preventable deaths of Maine children and build up parents who struggle, thereby fostering a culture of justice and resilience.

We urge you to vote Ought Not To Pass on LD 761.

Sincerely,

Kelli McCannell, Executive Director
Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights (GRR!)

Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights (GRR!) works, through education and advocacy, to secure access to sexual & reproductive health, rights & justice for present & future generations.