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## Testimony for LD 168: AN ACT REGARDING CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR THE SALE, TRANSFER OR EXCHANGE OF FIREARMS

Thank you to Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and the members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee for the opportunity to share my written testimony. My name is Dr. Amy Buczkowski, and I am a hospital-based pediatrician that lives in Freeport, Maine. I represent the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and thus, represent a large network of pediatricians across the state of Maine. We stand in support of LD 168, because expanded legislation to require criminal background checks for private firearm sales allows for improved child and adolescent safety through prevention of suicide and firearm violence.

As pediatricians, we care deeply about supporting policies that promote the safety of Maine children and communities, as this is an integral part of creating an environment conducive to our children growing and developing to reach their full potential. States that require universal background checks on firearm sales have reduced rates of homicide and suicide by firearm. Thus, when implemented, universal background checks can be an important public health tool.

As a pediatrician, it is also my duty to look at this issue through a youth mental health lens. We are experiencing a critical youth mental health crisis in Maine. As a provider who practices in the hospital setting, I have seen first-hand the extreme effects of nonlethal brain injury in the setting of near-suicide by firearm. The impact is devastating, turning a moment's impulsive decision into a lifelong path of neurologic and mental health difficulties. In 2021 alone, almost 5,000 Maine high schoolers attempted suicide<sup>1</sup>. Firearms are a potent, lethal means by which our youth can attempt self-harm or suicide, and 56% of suicides in Maine used a firearm in 2021<sup>2</sup>. Private sales in Maine currently provide a loophole for young people who cannot buy firearms legally through federally licensed dealers. It is important to close this loophole to keep our youth from accessing firearms through private transactions and protect those experiencing thoughts of suicide during their most vulnerable moments. Requiring background checks for private firearm sales really does work as a suicide prevention intervention. In states that require a background check for private firearm sales, there are 48% fewer firearm suicides as compared to states that do not require it, while rates of suicide by other methods are nearly identical<sup>3</sup>.

Maine voters overwhelmingly support universal background checks. In a 2021 Giffords Law Center poll, 70% of Maine voters supported universal background checks, including 63% of gun owners. I urge you to join me, Maine pediatricians, and most Maine voters in support of expanding background checks for the private sale, transfer, or exchange of firearms in Maine. A vote in support is a vote to keep Maine's children safe.

Thank you!

## References

1. "2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey." Maine Department of Health and Human Services and Maine Department of Education. [https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2021\\_Reports/Detailed\\_Reports/HS/MIYHS2021\\_Detailed\\_Reports\\_HS\\_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2021_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2021_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf)
2. "Report to the Legislature, Re: Report pursuant to 22 MRS, Ch. 256-A §1425." Maine Department of Health and Human Services and Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/9742>
3. "Universal Background Checks for Gun Purchases." American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/state-advocacy/universal-background-checks-for-gun-purchases/>