

April 3, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is John Hennessy. I am the Advocacy Director for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine offering testimony in support of LD 22, 60, and 168.

Most religious Americans believe gun reform is necessary to save lives. ⁽¹⁾ Religious Americans overwhelmingly support commonsense policies aimed at gun violence prevention. One study found that most Americans affiliated with a religious community – 84 percent of Buddhist, Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslims – support background checks for all gun sales. ⁽²⁾

The Episcopal Diocese of Maine supports:

LD 22 – An Act to Impede the Transfer of Firearms to Prohibited Persons

This bill creates a Class D crime for anyone who knowingly or intentionally sells or transfers a firearm to a person whom the seller/transferor either knows or has reason to believe is prohibited from having a firearm under 15 MSRA Section 393. This proposed legislation increases gun safety in the state by trying to ensure that prohibited persons do not possess firearms. The Bill results from a specific recommendation of the 2nd Annual Report of the Deadly Force Review Panel [2021 Report](#) submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary in January 2022. That Report noted the use of firearms by prohibited persons in cases where deadly force was used and recommended the passage of a statute like L.D. 22 to safeguard not only the individuals against whom deadly force was used but also law enforcement responding to these situations.

The Maine CDC issued a report in June 2022 that confirmed the danger of both suicides and homicides committed with firearms. We believe imposing criminal penalties on persons selling/transferring firearms to prohibited people should positively impact the number of suicides in Maine. We hope you will support this bill.

LD 60 – An Act to Require a 72 House Waiting Period After the Sale of a Firearm

In Maine, where no pre-purchase license is required to buy a gun, this bill's post purchase waiting period provides a critical "time buffer" to give an impulsive, angry, or suicidal buyer 72 hours to settle down. Gun purchase waiting periods reduce the number of firearm deaths. States that have licensing or post-purchase waiting period laws have substantially lower firearm suicide percentages and total lower suicide rates than states without such laws.

Although a similar waiting period bill failed to pass in an earlier Maine legislative session, the need to address the recent alarming increase in firearm suicides by Maine youth and Maine veterans, and changing attitudes among gun owners about the importance of keeping guns from those who are dangerous to themselves or others, may cause this bill, this year, to succeed. Its passage would save dozens of Maine lives every year. We hope you will support this bill.

LD 168 – An Act Regarding Criminal Background Checks for the Sale, Transfer, or Exchange of Firearms

Under current law, people who sell guns privately, through advertising, including online, and at gun shows or anywhere else without a federal dealer's license can transfer firearms without having to run any background check on the buyer. This means that unless state law requires a background check for these sales, people convicted of felonies, domestic abuse and other prohibited persons who cannot legally buy guns can easily buy them.

This bill will require background checks for private sales, subject to certain exceptions. It provides that the first offense for knowingly selling, transferring, or exchanging a firearm in violation of the criminal background check required is a civil violation for which the penalty is a fine of up to \$1,000 and subsequent offenses is a Class D crime.

This bill will help stop out-of-staters from buying guns in Maine. We believe private sale background checks can prevent suicides and shootings and do not violate the second amendment. As stated above, nationwide and in Maine, voters want background checks with private gun sales.

The bottom line is expanding background checks to private sellers will save lives. Please support this bill.

(1) Morning Consult and *Politico*, "National Tracking Poll #210449" (2021), p. 228, available at https://assets.morningconsult.com/wp-uploads/2021/04/14112602/210449_crosstabs_POLITICO_RVs_v1_AUTO-1.pdf.

(2) Jana Riess, "Which religions support gun control in the US?", Religion News Service, August 29, 2019, available at <https://religionnews.com/2019/08/29/which-religions-support-gun-control-in-the-us/>.