



Maine Education Association

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Testimony In Support of

**LD 22 An Act to Impede the Transfer of Firearms to Prohibited Persons, and
LD 60 An Act to Require a 72-Hour Waiting Period After the Sale of a Firearm, and
LD 168 An Act Regarding Criminal Background Checks for the Sale, Transfer or Exchange of
Firearms, and
LD 582, An Act to Enhance Certain Penalties for Possession of Firearms by Prohibited Persons**
Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
April 3, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher prep programs as well as many retired educators.

I am here to testify on behalf of MEA in support of LD 22 An Act to Impede the Transfer of Firearms to Prohibited Persons, LD 60 An Act to Require a 72-Hour Waiting Period After the Sale of a Firearm, LD 168 An Act Regarding Criminal Background Checks for the Sale, Transfer or Exchange of Firearms, and LD 582, An Act to Enhance Certain Penalties for Possession of Firearms by Prohibited Persons.

Shortly after yet another horrific school shooting, the tragedy in Uvalde, the MEA Board of Directors took a formal position that said in part:

“The MEA Board of Directors knows that it is essential that our students and educators have safe and supportive environments in which to learn, teach, and work. Therefore, the MEA Board of Directors believes it is critical for our government officials to take further actions towards preventing acts of violence, both in our places of education as well as in our communities.”

Since then, we have continued to hear of mass shootings, both in schools and in communities across the nation.

The following is from an article in the Washington Post, dated March 29, 2023, with the headline “More than 348,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine”:

“There were more school shootings in 2022 — 46 — than in any year since at least 1999.

“Beyond the dead and wounded, children who witness the violence or cower behind locked doors to hide from it can be profoundly traumatized.

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“The federal government does not track school shootings, so The Washington Post has spent years tracking how many children in the United States have been exposed to gun violence during school hours since the Columbine High massacre in 1999.

“The Post pieces together its numbers from news articles, open-source databases, law enforcement reports, and calls to schools and police departments.

“There have been 376 school shootings since Columbine

*“The most recent school shooting was **6 days ago.**”*

In an article from November 2021 updated a week ago, it states that our country is the only one where there are more civilian guns than there are people—120 guns per 100 people.¹

Just last month, here in Maine, a ten-year old student brought a firearm to their elementary school.² Fortunately, the unthinkable was avoided—this time.

We know that the measures called for in these proposals will not eliminate the possibility of yet another tragedy. They will not do much to alleviate the extreme worry, fear, trauma, or stress that every educator experiences when there is yet another incident, that every student experiences, that every parent experiences when we hear of these tragic, horrific events. But the measures called for in this proposed legislation may, just may, reduce that possibility, if only a bit.

Even if we can move just slightly more in the direction of making our schools and our communities safer places for us all, shouldn't we do that?

I have been told that it is not a question of 'if' there will be a tragedy in Maine, but rather it is a question of 'when'. Yet I remain hopeful that we can change things so that 'when' never occurs.

We urge you to vote 'ought to pass' on LD 22, LD 60, LD 168, and LD 582. It is the responsible thing to do.

¹<https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/26/world/us-gun-culture-world-comparison-intl-cmd/index.html>

²<https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/crime/maine-student-10-faces-charges-after-bringing-gun-to-school-friday-monroe/97-45890f8e-5341-4ad0-9981-39febfb1f8e7>