

Testimony of Austin Vaughan

In Reference to:

**LD 60: An Act to Require a 72 Hour Waiting Period After the Sale of a Firearm**

Public Hearing: April 3, 2023, at 1:00 PM in State House, Room 436

Dear Representatives Craven, Arford, Crafts, Dodge, Gramlich, White, and distinguished members of the Committee of Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Austin Vaughan, a second-year osteopathic medical student studying at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine. I am currently located in Biddeford but will be moving to Lewiston next year for my rotations. I will hopefully be able to do my pediatric residency right here in Maine, a place my partner and I are now proud to call home. I'm submitting this testimony on behalf of myself.

For most of human history, disease was the number one cause of child mortality in the United States – it still holds that infamous title in many countries around the world. Starting in the 1960s, that unfortunate top spot in the U.S. was overtaken by motor vehicle accidents, which continued to be by far the leading cause of death of children and adolescents for the last 60 years, until recently.

Last year, the CDC released data showing that as of 2020, the number one cause of death in children in the United States is guns<sup>1</sup>. More than 1 in every 20,000 children died in 2020 from a firearm<sup>2</sup>. For reference, in only one other comparable country is gun-related deaths in the top five cause of child mortality – Canada, where it is ranked number 5. Canada had 48 deaths. The United States had 4,357.<sup>2</sup>

This data is undeniably upsetting, especially to those who have been affected by it firsthand. I was living in Tampa in 2016 when the Pulse Nightclub shooting occurred. I remember every tribute posted, every protest attended, and every letter wrote that year, and the frustration when it didn't move the needle. Less than 2 years later, one of my friends was a teacher at Marjory Stoneman Douglas School in Miami in 2018, when 14 children and 3 adults were killed, with another 17 wounded. I count myself incredibly lucky to have not yet been affected firsthand by gun violence, and yet I still palpably feel its effects around me.

But there's data that shows common sense gun laws, including mandatory waiting periods, can help! Even with the difficulty in well-funded research due to successful gun-lobbying, there are studies that show well-written, purposeful legislation can make a difference. One Harvard study demonstrated a 17% drop in gun-related homicides and a 7-11% drop in gun-related suicides by imposing a mandatory waiting period.<sup>3</sup> Separate data clearly shows that states with more permissive gun laws (or lack thereof) have a significantly higher rate of mass shootings.<sup>4</sup>

My goal for my entire life has been to become a pediatrician, with the sole passion of wanting to see children grow up to be healthy and live extraordinary lives. I've spent the last two years studying diseases in school, am spending the next two learning treatments in hospitals, and then will spend the rest of my life helping children in the real world. Nothing can deter me from that goal. But I would be lying if I didn't say it's hard to swallow that the number one cause of death

in children here in the U.S. is something that no stethoscope or scalpel can fix. It's up to **all of us** to create a world safe enough for our children to live full, confident lives – unburdened by the fear that their school may be the next one in danger. So please, let's take a step toward that world together by passing LD 60. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Austin Vaughan

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University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine

1. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmc2201761>
2. <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries/>
3. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1619896114>
4. <https://www.bmj.com/content/364/bmj.l542>