



Testimony of Melissa Hackett  
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In opposition to LD 518, LD 52, and LD 1557  
April 26, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett. I am a policy associate with the Maine Children's Alliance, submitting testimony in opposition to LDs 518, 52, and 1557, related to firearms in schools.

In 2020, firearms became the leading cause of death among children ages 19 and below and in the first six months of 2022, there were over 300 mass shootings across the U.S., including the shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas.<sup>i</sup> We need policy solutions to address the serious issue of gun violence for children and youth that will reduce the likelihood that they will be harmed by guns in their schools and in their communities. Yet introducing more guns into schools is not an effective policy solution to address this issue, and in fact, may contribute to more firearm injuries in schools.

Arming private contractors, teachers, and allowing individuals with concealed carry permits on school grounds makes students less safe – not more. Evidence has shown that when shootings occur, they are very rarely stopped by armed civilians.<sup>ii</sup> Additionally, a 2021 JAMA network study suggested “no association between having an armed officer and deterrence of violence” in mass shootings from 1980 to 2019.<sup>iii</sup>

Having more firearms in schools could result in more unintentional and accidental shootings in schools. In 2022, there were 324 accidental shootings by children in the United States.<sup>iv</sup> Arming teachers will only increase the risk that children will access guns and accidentally discharge them in schools.<sup>v</sup> The Giffords Law Center has a list of incidents where school personnel mishandled their guns in school, resulting in the guns being accessed by students, and in some cases, injured by them. As of July 2022, it found that in the previous 5 years there had been nearly 100 such incidents.<sup>vi</sup>

We need to invest in proven policy and practice solutions to keep students safe from gun violence in schools. This includes keeping guns out of the hands of people who shouldn't have them, fostering safe and trusting school environments, crisis intervention programs, access and lock upgrades, and trauma-informed emergency planning.<sup>vii</sup> We urge this committee to vote ought not to pass on these bills, and to instead consider other opportunities you have to pass meaningful gun safety legislation that will reduce the likelihood that students will experience gun violence in their schools and communities.

Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.kff.org/other/issue-brief/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-adolescents/>

<sup>ii</sup> An ABA 2019 Report notes that there is no evidence supporting the value of arming school personnel: in 160 shooter incidents, there was only one successful armed civilian intervention- by a U.S. Marine.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2776515>

<sup>iv</sup> Everytown Research & Policy, #NotAnAccident

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<sup>v</sup> In 2019 the American Bar Association issued a report and resolution opposing laws “that would authorize teachers, principals or other non-security school personnel to possess a firearm in, or on the grounds of, a pre-K through grade 12 public, parochial, or private school,” and cited a number of organizations that also were on record as opposing the enactment of such laws, including the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of School Resource Officers, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the School Superintendents Association. The 2019 ABA Report states: “Data suggests that arming teachers will increase the risk of students being shot, not reduce it.” It refers to the findings of law enforcement practitioners who had convened at the Division of Public Safety Leadership at Johns Hopkins University and concluded “that a large portion of the population and policymakers who support arming teachers make incorrect assumptions about how effective armed teachers would be in an active shooter situation. [They identified] 22 factors that an armed teacher would have to assess quickly and act upon in an active shooter situation.”

<sup>vi</sup> Giffords Law Center; Every Incident of Mishandled Guns in Schools, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/every-incident-of-mishandled-guns-in-schools/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://everytownresearch.org/report/how-to-stop-shootings-and-gun-violence-in-schools/>