



April 26, 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 **opposition** to LD 52 & LD 1557.

The Episcopal Church has advocated at least since the 1970s for legislation seeking to reduce the risk of gun violence in the United States. Decades later, we see gun violence continuing daily, in communities with high rates of violence, especially in communities of color, in domestic disputes and in violence against women, in suicides, and in mass shootings in night clubs, churches and schools.

We believe guns in schools are an unnecessary and significant threat to the safety of children. Schools should be a haven from violence. The tragedies that took place at Sandy Hook, Robb Elementary, Columbine, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Virginia Tech, and other schools across the US have demonstrated the devastating effect guns have on our school communities. Calls to arm teachers will only lead to more gun deaths and injuries, not fewer.

There is no reason to believe such proposals will help curb those instances of gun violence at school. Teachers are not trained law enforcement officers—their purpose is to be educators. Arming teachers [introduces risks to students and staff](#), as well as school districts themselves. These include the risk of teachers accidentally shooting themselves or students and fellow staff. There are also moral and legal risks associated with improper or inaccurate defensive use of a firearm – even for teachers who have undertaken specialized firearms training.

One [study](#) from the Rand Center on Quality Policing found that highly trained police in gunfights [hit their target only 18% of the time](#). Even if teachers, who would likely have less [training](#), achieve the same accuracy, four or five of every six bullets fired by a teacher would hit something or someone other than the shooter. Further, a teacher responding with force to a shooter may be mistaken for the perpetrator by law enforcement or by armed colleagues.

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Episcopalians have joined the nation in prayer for the 533 American children under the age of 17 who have died by guns since the start of 2023 and the 1,286 who have been injured while attending school. According to a [Pew Research report](#) released this month, gun deaths among America's children increased by 50% between 2019 and 2021. Last year marked the deadliest year in American schools [since 1999](#).

There is no doubt that our schools need to be made safe and secure. We believe that the presence of more guns makes us less safe. The best means of deterring gun violence is to ensure that there are fewer and less-lethal guns.

Most religious Americans believe gun reform is necessary to save lives and overwhelmingly support commonsense policies aimed at gun violence prevention. For example, 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.

Please vote ought not to pass on these bills.

"It is not a question if God is in our streets or not. God is here, God is there. What is heartbreaking is that the God in our streets, for now, is suffering and lamenting, seeing the blood of the old and the young. Along with God's, our hearts are breaking, too. It is time for us to wake from this shared nightmare, and recall that we are called to believe that safe streets, schools, and communities, are not only possible, but essential for the sake of our state and our souls."

Episcopal Bishops in the State of Tennessee
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