

Testimony in Opposition to LD 52, LD 518 and LD 1557

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Cam Shannon. I live in Yarmouth. I am the board chair of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition. And I am the mother of three children - a 14-year-old in high school, a 12-year-old in sixth grade, and a six-year-old in kindergarten. For the sake of my children and other Maine children, I ask you to oppose LD 52 "An Act to Allow Certain School Employees to Carry Firearms on School Property", LD 518 "An Act to Provide for Professional Armed Security in Schools", and LD 1557 "An Act to Increase and Enhance School Safety by Allowing Individuals with Concealed Carry Permits to Possess Handguns on School Property".

Since the passage of federal legislation in 1990, schools have largely been gun-free zones - spaces where most people are not legally allowed to carry guns. There are some exceptions to this rule, like School Resource Officers, but, at least in Maine, SROs are highly trained professionals having completed police training and served as officers for a number of years before they ever enter a school. SROs have extensive weapons experience. They know how to handle a weapon properly in an emergency situation. They have also been trained in de-escalation techniques. In other words, when faced with a dangerous situation in a school, an SRO knows how to lower the temperature and reduce the risk of harm. And, if de-escalation is impossible, an SRO is trained to handle a weapon carefully and effectively, thereby not unwittingly injuring those around him - and making a dangerous situation an even more lethal one.

The three bills before you today provide no such protection for our children, teachers, and other school employees. None of the three bills ensure that the people they would allow to carry guns in schools would be thoroughly trained - trained enough to safely carry weapons around our children. In the case of LD 52 and LD 518, local school committees would be empowered to set the training standards for the school employees and professional armed security. Who's to say that the school board members empowered to set standards would know enough to do so well? There is certainly no guarantee that those allowed by the passage of these bills to carry guns in schools would be required to receive enough training to know how to keep our children safe in a dangerous moment.

LD 1557 is even more concerning. This bill, if passed, would allow ANYONE over the age of 18 with a concealed carry permit to carry a gun within a school. Maine has no training requirements associated with a concealed carry permit. So, LD 1557, would allow people without any training requirements to carry guns in schools. This could include anyone from a teacher to a technician servicing the copier to a student.

I can imagine countless problems that could arise should these bills pass. A child could find one of the many guns now allowed in the school and accidentally discharge it, injuring themselves or others. An angry middle schooler could pull a gun from his teacher's desk, turning a rough moment into a fatal one, simply because a deadly weapon was close at hand. And how would having additional guns help in the case of an active shooter? Research suggests that even those highly trained have imperfect aim. A teacher or school staffer could not be expected to properly aim in a crisis. What if he or she, in an effort to protect children, actually hurt them? And what of an active shooting situation? How could the police arriving on the scene know the difference between a custodian with a gun and a shooter with a gun?

These bills are far too risky and our children are far too precious. Please. I urge you to oppose LD 52, LD 518, and LD 1557.