

April 28, 2021

Testimony in favor of LD 1392, An Act Directing the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention to Release Annually Public Health Data Regarding Certain Fatalities and Hospitalizations

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Judith Feinstein, I live in Hallowell, and I am a semi-retired public health professional and former state employee.

In public health, we rely on evidence and data to guide our work. LD 1392 adds the inclusion of public health data on firearm fatalities to the Maine CDC's existing responsibility for an annual report. In order for the Maine CDC to meet their obligations for this report – the bottom line being to show how they have responded to challenges and threats, and “aided in keeping the residents of the State healthy and safe,” they need data. Many years ago, working with a federal Public Health Service officer on one of the first grants I administered in state government, that individual asked about our plans for data collection, and said, almost casually, “you realize, without data, you are just an opinion.” Her words have never left my mind.

A cornerstone in public health work is the concept of prevention. Almost by definition, this involves monitoring the extent and impact of the problem being addressed. We do this by collecting data, and we need timely, consistent, and reliable data so that we can evaluate the extent of the problem and then monitor and measure the impact of our activities. We do this with other health issues – accidents and injuries, teen pregnancy, and chronic diseases. We are doing it with COVID-19. Gun violence has been termed a public health crisis, an epidemic, in this country. Having access to data about firearm fatalities and including it in public reports are functions that belong in the Maine CDC so that sensible policies and programs can be developed and implemented. To me, this is common sense, and also a matter of accountability. Gun violence is a serious public health issue in Maine, one that we can and must address, and with our best resources. We really can't afford not to.

Others will speak to details, but I hope you will vote to support LD 1392, and any needs that DHHS and the Maine CDC have in order to implement it. Thank you.