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Testimony in support 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

My name is David Wennberg, I reside in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. I am a physician and moved to Maine in 1987 with my wife, Senator Anne Carney, to do my residency at Maine Medical Center. Afterwards I went to the Harvard School of Public Health and then returned to Maine to do clinical work, teaching and public health research at Maine Medical Center and the Maine Medical Assessment Foundation. For the last 20 years I have been on the health care business side, most recently as the CEO of Quartet Health, a company whose mission is to improve the lives of people with mental health conditions; I stepped down from the CEO position in January but remain on the board. I am also an avid outdoorsman. I love to fish the waters of Maine and while I am not a hunter, I have deep respect for those who hunt for food and sport.

As a recent CEO of a mental health care company, I could speak to the to the data that find that guns are used in over half of all deaths by suicide, however, instead I speak to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine in [2018 by Dr. Rebecca Cunningham](#) and colleagues from the University of Michigan identifying the leading causes of death in children and adolescents. They found that firearms were the second most common cause of death for those between the ages of 1 and 19, exceeded only by deaths from motor vehicle crashes.

Even more interesting were the changes in mortality rates from motor vehicles between 1999 to 2016: deaths by motor vehicle crashes decreased by over 50%. Why did this happen? Significant funding for research at the state and federal level identified the proximate causes of automobile injuries; this research resulted in important changes in policy that lead to airbags and the routine use of seatbelts and child seats for children and adolescents. Deaths by firearms over those same 18 years were unchanged.

How did the researchers know the cause of death when the Dickey Amendment has prohibited funding of firearms research for over 20 years? It is because death certificates are routinely collected and they have the cause of death. Yet as we know from the COVID 19 pandemic, death is both a lagging indicator and the tip of the iceberg - there are many more injuries and disabilities than there are deaths. Dr. Cunningham could not say how these injuries might have been avoided. If we had treated gun research in the same way we have treated motor vehicle research we would be able to answer questions such as what is the impact of trigger locks, gun safes, or safety training on the injury and death rates related to firearms. Unfortunately, without the routine collection of data, these questions are unanswerable.

As both a public health researcher, and as a businessman, I know from experience that data and information is critical to good decision making. For the esteemed members of the Maine legislature, collecting and analyzing data is key to sound policy. I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1392.