



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association In Support of:
LD 1120: An Act to Promote the Secure Storage of Firearms
LD 1299: An Act to Prohibit the Unsecured Storage of Handguns in Motor Vehicles**

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
State House, Room 438
Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association.

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 850 individual members and nearly 70 organizations across the state. MPHA works to optimize the health of people and places in Maine through advocacy, education, partnerships, and public health workforce development. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

We support LD 1120: "An Act to Promote the Secure Storage of Firearms" and LD 1299: "An Act to Prohibit the Unsecured Storage of Handguns in Motor Vehicles" because safe storage of firearms is a preventive public health strategy to protect Maine communities from gun violence. In 2022, more than 25,000 people died from suicide with a firearm – equivalent to a gun suicide death every 21 minutes.¹ Among youth, 43% of suicides were with a gun.¹ Research shows that safe storage laws are associated with reductions in teen suicides and unintentional injuries among children.^{2,3,4}

Violence in America, and here in Maine, is a public health crisis that affects people in all stages of life, from infancy to older adults. It leaves physical and emotional scars, derails lives, and erodes communities by reducing productivity, decreasing property values, and disrupting social services.⁵ Violence is also a vicious cycle – if someone is exposed to violence, they're more likely to commit future violence.⁶ Violence is a leading cause of premature death and disability in the U.S., and here in Maine.

Data show that different types of violence tend to co-occur, such that in areas where there are higher rates of community-level gun violence there are also higher rates of domestic violence and child abuse. At the community level, gun violence tends to occur more often in areas already experiencing social and economic disparities, including geographic racial segregation and concentrated poverty.⁷ Moreover, childhood trauma, including domestic violence and community violence, may be a risk factor for gun violence later in life.⁸ A public health approach to violence prevention fosters healthy gender norms and relationships, bolsters trauma-informed services, limits access to firearms, and works to mitigate racism by changing norms and behaviors; collectively, these efforts lead to reductions in violence.⁹

Violence in the U.S.

- According to the [Gun Violence Archive](#), in 2024, there were 503 mass shootings, and 667 murder-suicides, in the U.S. Nearly 17,000 individuals lost their lives due to gun violence last year.
- Firearms remain the leading cause of death for children and teens.¹⁰

Violence in Maine:

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- In 2023, 18.3% of middle schoolers reported that violence in their home, or the threat of violence, made them want to leave home, even if only for a short while.¹¹
- Domestic violence represented 29% of total reported assaults in 2022.¹²
- 1 in 5 Mainers will experience sexual assault during their lifetime.¹³
- According to the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 89% of firearm fatalities in 2021 were suicides, a rate significantly higher than the national average.¹⁴
- One of the deadliest mass shootings in America occurred here in Maine, claiming 19 people's lives.

Gun violence is not inevitable. It can be prevented through a comprehensive public health approach that keeps families and communities safe, while respecting responsible gun owners. We believe these bills are protective of public health. As such, we respectfully request you to vote LD 1120 and LD 1299 "Ought to Pass." Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Everytown Research analysis of CDC, WONDER, Provisional Mortality Statistics, 2022. Ages 10–17. Available: <https://everytownresearch.org/two-decades-of-suicide-prevention-laws-lessons-from-national-leaders-in-gun-safety-policy/#secure-storage-laws-and-youth-gun-suicides>

² Kivisto AJ, Kivisto KL, Gurnell E, Phalen P, Ray B. Adolescent Suicide, Household Firearm Ownership, and the Effects of Child Access Prevention Laws. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2021 Sep;60(9):1096-1104.

³ Webster DW, Vernick JS, Zeoli AM, Manganello JA. Association between youth-focused firearm laws and youth suicides. *JAMA*. 2004 Aug 4;292(5):594-601. doi: 10.1001/jama.292.5.594. Erratum in: *JAMA*. 2004 Sep 8;292(10):1178.

⁴ Webster DW, Starnes M. Reexamining the association between child access prevention gun laws and unintentional shooting deaths of children. *Pediatrics*. 2000 Dec;106(6):1466-9.

⁵ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020. [Violence prevention: A public health issue](#).

⁶ Weaver CM, Borkowski JG, Whitman TL. Violence breeds violence: Childhood exposure and adolescent conduct problems. *J Community Psychol*. 2008;36(1):96–112.

⁷ Santilli A, O'Connor Duffany K, Carroll-Scott A, Thomas J, Greene A, Arora A, Agnoli A, Gan G, & Ickovics J. 2017. [Bridging the response to mass shootings and urban violence: Exposure to violence in New Haven, Connecticut](#). *American Journal of Public Health*;107:374-379.

⁸ Wamser-Nanney R, Nanney JT, Conrad E, Constans JI. 2019. [Childhood trauma exposure and gun violence risk factors among victims of gun violence](#). *Psychol Trauma*;11(1):99-106.

⁹ American Public Health Association. 2018. [Violence is a public health issue: Public health is essential to understanding and treating violence in the U.S.](#)

¹⁰ Villarreal S, Kim R, Wagner E, Somayaji N, Davis A & Crifasi CK. 2024. Gun violence in the United States 2022: Examining the burden among children and teens. Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

¹¹ Maine Department of Health and Human Services & Maine Department of Education. 2023. [Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey Middle School Report](#).

¹² State of Maine Department of Public Safety. 2022. [Crime in Maine 2022](#).

¹³ Dumont R & Shaler G. 2015. Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

¹⁴ Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Maine DHHS. Feb 2023. [Report pursuant to 22 MRS, Ch. 256-A §1425](#).