

David Souers
Friendship
LD 1299

LD 1299 - An Act to Prohibit the Unsecured Storage of Handguns in Motor Vehicles

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, Members of the committee, I am David Souers. I live in Friendship, Maine. I am a retired healthcare facility architect from a family that owned, collected and used firearms as a hobby, and for recreation, target practice, hunting and protecting our agriculture from certain wildlife, in compliance with a variety of laws protecting ourselves and others for the types of firearms, locations and use.

I am testifying in favor of LD 1299 for the following reasons:

1. Gun thefts are a significant problem for keeping firearms under the control and supervision of the legitimate owner. Obviously the purpose of having a firearm is defeated when the firearm is lost or stolen. Gun theft is a crime and a source of guns used in crimes. How we treat our firearm security can lead to significant numbers of losses and thefts:
 - a. On average, at least one gun is stolen from a car every nine minutes in the United States.
 - b. Research shows that storing firearms in vehicles significantly increases the risk of theft, and that the rate of gun thefts from cars tripled from 2013-2023.
 - c. From 2016-2019, Maine averaged 897 thefts from motor vehicles per year, which rose to 1,450 per year from 2020 to 2023.
 - d. Specific data on firearm thefts from vehicles in Maine is limited, but national trends show an increase in such incidents.
 - e. One national survey found that 11% of gun owners store firearms in their vehicles while at home, and among them, 52% did not use a locking device. I you are like me, and many Mainers are, we do not typically lock our cars in our own driveways or at locations where we don't anticipate leaving our car out of sight for very long. Most items in my car are not worth stealing nor worrying about. If a firearm is kept casually in the car, it's not likely to be thought about as a target for theft.
 - f. Regarding secure storage more broadly (in vehicles and in the home), 28% of gun owners report never use locking devices, while 38% use them sometimes. Around 16% store firearms both unlocked and loaded at all times, while 53.2% sometimes do.
 - g. Crime guns are often locally sourced; most firearms recovered from crimes were originally purchased within the same state-often within the same county.
2. We Can Reduce The Supply of Crime Guns:
 - a. Storing a firearm in a locked, hard-sided container within our vehicle minimizes the likelihood that it can be accessed by an unauthorized user or stolen from the vehicle.
 - b. Stolen firearms have nine times the likelihood of being used in crimes as opposed to legally sold and bought firearms.
 - c. Securely storing firearms in vehicles is likely to significantly reduce the supply of crime guns.
 - d. Stolen firearms are attractive to illegal markets, where they can be sold to people who cannot legally purchase firearms, including those with histories of violent acts.
3. Preventing Firearm Theft:
 - a. Keeping our firearms and its storage container out of sight decreases crimes of opportunity in which an individual might break into a vehicle solely to obtain a visible firearm.
 - b. These laws can help protect gun owners from car break ins and theft that may be facilitated or caused by a viewable firearm in the vehicle.
 - c. More than half (51%) of gun thefts in 2022 involved firearms stolen from vehicles.

d. Gun thefts from cars are the largest source of stolen guns.

4. Less Fatal Road Rage:

a. Storing firearms out of sight and reach of passengers can minimize the accessibility of firearms that might be used accidentally or to escalate a situation.

b. Between 2014-2023, the number of people shot in road rage incidents increased by more than 400%. Removing firearms from high stress situations such as these can help reduce firearm injury and death.

5. Other States Have Similar Laws:

a. California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, and New York, as well as Washington DC, require firearms to be securely stored in motor vehicles.

6. Exemptions:

a. This policy includes exemptions for gun owners engaged in lawful hunting activities.

b. The penalties for violations of secure storage requirements will not apply if an individual's firearm is stolen from their vehicle and they comply fully with the state's lost and stolen firearm reporting requirements.

7. Civil Penalties:

a. Penalties for violation of the law are civil, not criminal.

8. Constitutionality:

a. Second Amendment challenges to safe storage laws have been repeatedly rejected by the courts.

b. Additionally, requiring secured storage of firearms in vehicles would not interfere with actions protected by Maine's permit-less carry law.

I advocate that LD 1299 ought to pass.