



Testimony of Kristen Kinchla

Research Associate, the Maine Children's Alliance

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

**LD 1378, An Act to Protect Maine Communities by Enacting the Extreme Risk Protection Order**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Committee on the Judiciary, my name is Kristen Kinchla, and I am the Research Associate with the Maine Children's Alliance. The Maine Children's Alliance is a state-wide, nonpartisan, research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound policies and best practices that improve the lives of Maine's children, youth, and families.

I am providing testimony on behalf of MCA, a proud member of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition, in strong support of LD 1378, An Act to Protect Maine Communities by Enacting the Extreme Risk Protection Order. We are grateful for all the work that went into gathering signatures to get this on the ballot as a citizen referendum. Ultimately, the people of Maine will decide on this issue, as they should.

We all want our children to grow up healthy and transition safely into adulthood. As parents and adults, it is our responsibility to ensure children can grow up free from violence in their communities. As decision makers, you have the ability to take meaningful action to make Maine a safer place for children and youth. One important way that Maine can do that is to enact a Red Flag Law, a policy that empowers family members and law enforcement to seek an Extreme Risk Protection Order - a court order temporarily restricting a person's access to guns when they pose a danger to themselves or others. Twenty-one states and Washington, DC have Red Flag Laws in place, including states like Florida, Colorado, and Michigan, which share Maine's strong tradition of responsible gun ownership. Notably, courts have largely upheld these laws as constitutional and consistent with due process requirements.

When a person is in crisis, loved ones and law enforcement are often the first to see signs that they pose a threat to themselves or others. Red Flag Laws empower law enforcement and immediate family members to petition a court for an Extreme Risk Protection Order. If a court finds that a person poses a significant danger of injuring themselves or others with a firearm, that person is temporarily prohibited from purchasing and possessing guns and required to turn over their guns while the order is in effect. This, in effect, serves to protect both the individual and the larger community from harm.

Red Flag Laws are being enacted in response to America's gun violence epidemic, an epidemic that directly affects our children. Between 2013 and 2020, gun death rates for children and teens, ages 1 to 17, increased by 106 percent. Firearms became the leading cause of death for

this age group, killing more youth than any other cause, including car crashes and cancer. In 2022, there were 2,526 deaths from guns among 1 to 17-year-olds, averaging to nearly 7 per day.<sup>i</sup>

These laws also help address another American gun violence epidemic—firearm suicide. Between 2000 and 2021, suicide rates for youth and young adults ages 10-24 increased by 52.2 percent, making suicide the second leading cause of death for this age group. In more than half of all these suicides, guns were used.<sup>ii</sup> For a teenager going through a difficult time and considering suicide, reducing their access to a firearm can save their life. Nine out of ten suicide attempts with a gun result in death.<sup>iii</sup> In contrast, most people who attempt suicide by other means live—and do not eventually die by suicide.<sup>iv</sup> With about 1 in 5 middle- and high-school students in Maine reporting self-harming behaviors and/or that they had thought about dying by suicide, getting this law in place will save Maine youth.<sup>v</sup>

It is our job to protect children and youth growing up in communities across our state. When there are family members in crisis in the home, and they have access to a firearm, the children in that home are not safe. When a teenager is struggling with a challenging experience and has access to a firearm, they are not safe. It is our responsibility as community members to ensure that during times when individuals pose a danger to themselves or others, they do not have access to a firearm. Through this proposed Extreme Risk Protection Order, we can establish a legal process to ensure that we have a safeguard in place to keep our communities safe and save lives. This will ultimately be decided by the citizens of Maine, who we hope will join us in passing this commonsense legislation that supports the safety of children, youth, and communities across our state. Thank you.

---

<sup>i</sup> John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. (2024). New Report Highlights U.S. 2022 Gun-Related Deaths: Firearms Remain Leading Cause of Death for Children, Teens, and Disproportionately Affect People of Color: <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2024/guns-remain-leading-cause-of-death-for-children-and-teens#:~:text=The%20annual%20report's%20major%20focus,among%20this%20group%20since%202020>

<sup>ii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). Suicide Data and Statistics: <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/data.html#:~:text=Suicide%20methods,data%20for%20the%20chart%20figure>

<sup>iii</sup> Miller, M, Azrael, D, and Hemenway D. The Epidemiology of Case Fatality Rates for Suicide in the Northeast. Annals of Emergency Medicine. 2004: 723-730. [https://mhdo.maine.gov/\\_externalreports/epidemiologyofcasefatalityrate.pdf](https://mhdo.maine.gov/_externalreports/epidemiologyofcasefatalityrate.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Owens D, Horrocks J, and House A. Fatal and non-fatal repetition of self-harm: systematic review. British Journal of Psychiatry. 2002;181:193-199.

<sup>v</sup> Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Department of Education. (2023). Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey: <https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/2023-results>