

Arthur Dingley  
Auburn

Honorable members of the Legislative Committee on State and Local Government:

My name is Arthur R. Dingley. I am a lifelong Maine resident, a former attorney, and a physician, living in Auburn, Maine. This testimony is submitted in opposition to LD 805, scheduled for hearing before this Committee at 10AM on Monday, April 12.

This is yet another installment in the seemingly endless stream of poorly-conceived proposals submitted to the Maine Legislature to restrict the otherwise lawful possession of firearms. The proposed amendment to 21-A MRSA sec. 631 is so badly drafted it is not even possible to discern what its drafters would permit municipalities to forbid. For example, "Municipal officers may prohibit the POSSESSION AND DISPLAY of firearms . . ." (capitalization mine). Whatever can this mean? May I POSSESS a firearm at the polls in such a municipality so long as I do not DISPLAY it? That is the only reasonable reading of the conjunctive. This is followed by some perfectly silly "exception" if the firearm is within 250 feet of the polls (1) unloaded, (2) in a locked vehicle, and (3) further rendered invisible or locked again.

The most charitable motivation I can imagine for this proposal is that its sponsors feel that this is a "common sense" measure to "promote gun safety" and "prevent voter intimidation". The difficulty with that formulation is that responsible Maine gun owners have a very different idea of common sense. We carry firearms to enhance the safety of ourselves and the general public. I would imagine that most Maine gun owners would say that they carry a firearm to the polls in order to prevent physical intimidation by threats of imminent bodily harm.

There is common ground here. No one wants anyone to feel uncomfortable at the polls. Voting is the cornerstone of democracy and must be protected. Polling places should be welcoming and stress-free. Responsible gun owners know full-well that openly carrying a firearm may be misinterpreted by others and result in apprehension. Few gun owners would disagree with a local rule which prohibited open carry or other display of a firearm within some reasonable distance from a voting place. If the sponsors are not willing to make that "common sense" correction, their true motivation must necessarily be suspect.