

Janet Lynch
Pownal, representing myself.

Please accept this updated copy of my testimony, which addresses some questions raised during the hearing. Thank you.

To: Senator Joseph Baldacci, Representative Ann Matlack, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

From: Janet Lynch, Pownal, representing myself

Date: 12 April, 2021

Re: L.D. 805, "An Act To Allow Municipalities To Prohibit Firearms at Voting Places" OUGHT TO PASS

Dear Senator Joseph Baldacci, Representative Ann Matlack, and other Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government,

My name is Janet Lynch, I live in Pownal, and I represent myself.

I strongly urge you to please vote "OUGHT TO PASS" on L.D. 805, "An Act To Allow Municipalities To Prohibit Firearms at Voting Places" OUGHT TO PASS.

As someone who cares deeply about voting access and security, personal safety, and local autonomy, I was unpleasantly surprised to learn that current Maine law does not allow Maine's local municipalities to ban firearms from polling places on election day.

Several speakers today, both regarding this and other bills, have emphasized the importance of this bill to supporting home rule in our state, and I could not agree more.

Voting is the most basic, essential and sacred right of every American, and it is imperative that we all do everything in our power to ensure the right of all citizens to confidently and safely exercise that right. Throughout this country, there have been numerous unfortunate instances in which certain persons have brought firearms to polling places, with the apparent intent of intimidating potential voters from voting. Being stared down by, or even in close proximity to, someone with a firearm who is not an officer of the law while one is waiting to vote would be extremely intimidating. Additionally, having persons who are not law enforcement officers carrying firearms at voting places is a dangerous, potentially deadly, accident waiting to happen.

As you are well aware, guns are strictly prohibited in the Maine State House and at legislative committee meetings and hearings, for obvious public safety and security reasons, and to ensure the calm and thoughtful deliberation of legislative issues, without fear of threat of violence.

To address Rep Greenwood's question referencing Article I, Section 16 of the Maine Constitution that, "Every citizen has a right to keep and bear arms and this right shall never be questioned." I note that reasonable restrictions to protect public safety apply to virtually every constitutional right. For example, while the right to free speech is unquestionably fundamental to democracy, to protect public safety, the right to shout "Fire!" in a crowded theatre is obviously not protected speech.

L.D. 805 should be an absolute no-brainer to ensure safe, orderly and secure elections. It reasonably exempts firearms carried by law enforcement officers, as well as firearms which are safely and securely stored in locked vehicles. It does not compel municipalities to ban firearms from polling places on election day, but rather returns to municipalities full autonomy over our elections.

Maine's Constitution favors home rule by municipalities, yet as the law stands currently, the Legislature has prohibited counties, municipalities and political subdivisions of the State from regulating firearms, except for hunting within a municipality. (25 M.R.S.A. § 2011) This is unacceptable, as it robs communities and election officers responsible for safely and efficiently managing our elections from being able to safely manage those elections by making local decisions regarding the regulation of firearms at polling places.

This bill will give back to local communities and election officers the autonomy they need to safely manage our elections. It will inspire confidence in voters and discourage voter intimidation. It will also avoid potentially deadly tragedies which could be caused by persons who are not law enforcement officers brandishing and possibly using firearms in polling places on election day. Let's not wait for such a tragedy to happen to react; let's be proactive, and give back to Maine's municipalities the power to safely, securely and efficiently manage our elections.

Sincerely,

Janet Lynch