

Senator Carpenter, Representative Bailey and other esteemed members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Paula Voelker and I am here on behalf of the Maine Education Association to testify in support of LD 1312. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators statewide.

As an organization of educators, safety for children and families is extremely important to us. MEA strongly supports LD 1312 as common-sense legislation that increases the security of children and families and decreases children's exposure to gun violence.

Children are exposed to gun violence everywhere – at home, at school and in our greater communities. An estimated 3 million American children are exposed to gun violence every year.¹ Research has found that in instances where children were witness to domestic violence, more often than not guns were involved.² Exposure to violence has a profound impact on children's physical and mental health and development. In both the medical and education worlds, increasingly our understanding of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is helping us to address children's needs, but the very best solutions would move to limit or eliminate altogether these experiences in the first place. This legislation is one step in that direction.

It is impossible to talk about gun control measures without mention of school shootings. The horror of an attack by someone with a gun or guns in a school has sadly become something that we all live with. Since the 1999 school shootings at Columbine, over 226,000 students have experienced gun violence in schools.³ The most recent school shooting was just 18 days ago in Jacksonville, Florida, in a school with 350 students present. Just over a year ago, I became much too familiar with the trauma surrounding a school shooting. Before moving to Maine, I lived in Maryland and worked closely with the educators and union staff in St. Mary's County where a high school student was shot and killed by a former boyfriend upset about their recent break-up. Both students died. A school resource officer, cousin of our union staff person, responded and shot at the student with the gun. The mother of the male student was a school secretary and union member. The impact on this close-knit community lingers to this day. The students, educators, and community members in St. Mary's County

¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/impact-gun-violence-american-children-teens/>

² <https://www.preventdvgunviolence.org/children-domestic-violence-and-guns-022118.pdf>

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/school-shootings-database/?utm_term=.c0b255a10609

will never be the same. Maryland's red flag law was signed by the Governor there one month after this shooting.

You may also be familiar with another shooting that occurred in Maryland less than a year ago. This shooting took place at the Capital Press Gazette in Annapolis just blocks from where I lived and worked, and even closer to two elementary schools. The shooter was disgruntled by a court report the paper had published about a restraining order on the shooter for stalking a former classmate. The shooter had attempted to sue the newspaper, had sent threatening letters and law enforcement was aware. Five people died in that attack. Annapolis still mourns the loss of these innocent newspaper women and men. Maryland's red flag law went into effect three months after this shooting.

While not every instance of gun violence is carried out when there is probable cause to believe that the person poses an immediate and present danger of causing bodily injury to themselves or others, in cases where there is probable cause, there must be a legal avenue to prevent the likelihood of gun violence. Let's join the 14 other states that have enacted red flag laws to take steps to protect our children, families and communities by deterring this kind of violence in Maine.

I urge the committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1312.