



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
**An Act Regarding Access to Firearms by Extremely Dangerous and Suicidal Individuals**

April 22, 2019

Senator Carpenter, Representative Bailey and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am Jane Field, a resident of Portland, and the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. I am testifying on behalf of our seven member-denominations who represent 437 congregations with 55,000 members across the state, to urge you to support LD 1312.

Clergy in Maine's churches respond to firearm suicides in their congregations with horrifying regularity. Two years ago, I had to help a member of my church clean blood from her living room walls where her husband had shot himself the night before, and my story isn't unique-- every pastor I know has had to respond to families who have lost a loved one to a self-inflicted gunshot.

By the time the sun sets this Wednesday, someone in Maine will have used a gun to take his own life. One week from today, *three* people in Maine will have died by firearm suicide. The week after that, another two or three Mainers, the week after that another two or three, and so on through every week this year.

...That is, unless our legislature passes LD 1312 and puts into place a "red flag law" the way fifteen other states already have, including Indiana where the firearm suicide rate has dropped by 7.5%--here in our state, that would translate to saving the lives of ten Mainers every year.

We at the Maine Council of Churches are people of faith united in the belief that every person is a beloved child of God with inherent worth and infinite value. We take seriously the biblical mandate to love our neighbors and to respond with compassion to human suffering. For us, reducing gun violence is a profoundly *spiritual* concern. A church that did nothing in the face of suffering like what I've just described wouldn't be worthy of the name.

But it isn't just in a professional capacity that I stand before you today—it is also personal. Five years ago, my best friend of 30 years—an "auntie" to my daughter, and like a sister to me—Harvard Law educated criminal law professor, public radio and television commentator, author, wife, and mother of two young children—killed herself with a gun that she had purchased completely legally less than 12 hours after being discharged from the hospital where she had been admitted for a week following a failed suicide attempt that had been the culmination of a sudden and severe episode of depression. If there had been a red flag law on the books in Vermont in 2014, she wouldn't have been able to buy that gun and maybe her children would still have a mother today, her husband would still have his wife, my daughter would still have her Auntie Cheryl, I would still have my beloved lifelong friend, and the world would still have a brilliant lawyer, gifted scholar, and beloved teacher and mentor. For every story like Cheryl's, there are more than 130 every year here in Maine. LD 1312 would change that.

I ask you to imagine that the families, friends, pastors and colleagues of those 130 Mainers are standing here before you now, asking you—begging you—to do the right thing, the moral thing. For them, and for those whose lives it could save, please vote "ought to pass" on LD 1312.