

Testimony in favor of LD1312

By: Doug Rawlings

Thank you members of the Judiciary Committee for your attention to this important lifesaving policy.

I would like to ask that you consider joining me in support of LD 1312 not as a Maine citizen, although I have lived in Maine for 45 years now; not as an educator although I have taught in Maine high schools and at the University of Maine at Farmington for a combined 33 years; but as a Vietnam Veteran and as a co-founder of Veterans for Peace.

As a veteran I am concerned about the epidemic of suicides that has gripped our veterans' community for years now. According to the latest VA Report , approximately 6,000 Veterans die by suicide every year. The suicide rate of the veteran population is 1.5 times higher than that of non-Veteran adults. Most importantly, guns are the most common method of suicide among veterans -- over two-thirds of suicides among veterans are by gun. Now, perhaps you can see why I am joining Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in their campaign to temporarily restrict a person's access to firearms under certain dire circumstances.

You might know that we in the veterans community often employ a very dark sense of humor, so it may be no surprise that some veterans have cleverly defined "suicide" as "a permanent solution to a temporary problem." But after the laughter subsides, we often come to the somber realization that a fellow veteran consumed by the demons of PTSD or brain trauma injury or even moral injury — all recognized by the veterans administration as worthy of our concern — might leap at a misguided "solution" with a favorite weapon at a moment of complete, blinding distress. Only to permanently leave a family of loved ones behind, loved ones who in a calmer state of mind he or she would never, ever desert under any circumstances.

Although there is no panacea to prevent this horrible waste of a life, of lives, there is something we can do. We know that a wife, husband, sister, brother, father, or mother often recognizes warning signs of danger and realize that their veteran is in crisis and needs help to get through this tragic moment. And we know that if she or he did not have ready access to firearms in that moment of crisis, at that mind-numbing moment, his or her risk of suicide decreases dramatically, giving the veteran a chance to get help. Isn't it obvious that now is the time to take action? Isn't it time that we give families, law enforcement officers and fellow veterans a life saving tool so they can take action in times of crisis and prevent warning signs from turning into tragedies?

I would hope you would agree that it is, and would offer your support for a very sensible bill that would give law enforcement officers and loved ones a chance to

intervene on a veteran's behalf. We often glibly thank veterans for their service, but we owe them far more. We owe it to them to serve them in their times of need, to protect them as they so selflessly protected all of us. Doing all we can to help prevent firearm suicides is one of the most important actions we can take to fulfill this obligation. Let's give our veterans our support. Please vote in favor of LD1312. Allow us to serve those who have given so much to us. They deserve it. Thank you.