

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the committee, my name is Pearl Benjamin. I am 17 and a junior at Watershed High School, a co-founder of the Maine Teen Advocacy Coalition, and a constituent of Representative Doudera. I'm here today to ask you to support LD 379.

Since I was very young, I've had a horrible fear of guns. This makes sense for a child of my generation— we are, of course, the first generation to grow up with active shooter drills since kindergarten. Fear of impending violence has echoed in our brains since we were only five or six years old. Around that age, the mere photograph of a gun would scare me— the sight of a grip protruding from a police officer's belt would make my heart race. Even around the ages of nine or ten I'd have to leave the movie theater when a scene with a shooting flashed across the screen.

I seemed to have this idea that guns, and guns alone, were out to get me. That their capacity to kill wasn't controlled by humans, and that they could go off at any minute. Now, I know my childhood fears weren't entirely irrational.

Here in the United States, 8 children are accidentally shot every day with unsecured firearms in the home. Every day, 8 members of my generation find a loaded gun lying around their house and that gun goes off, just like it's supposed to. This is a huge risk for millions of children and families across our country. 4.6 million children live with unlocked, loaded guns in their homes, and 1 out of 3 homes with kids have guns. The vast majority of accidental firearm deaths among children are related to child access to firearms.

Weapons that are designed to kill are not ordinary household objects that should be left lying around— that's just common sense. I shouldn't have to instruct adults to put their guns away when they're not using them so their own child doesn't get shot. But the reality is that accidental home shootings are a serious problem here in our country, and we need to step up to prevent any more tragedies. We need legislation that will support gun owners taking responsibility for their weapons. We need legislation that will prevent guns from getting into the hands of young children. And most of all, we need legislation that will ensure that kids feel safe and secure in their homes, at their schools, and in their neighborhoods. Research indicates that responsible gun storage practices are associated with reduced rates of child firearm deaths. One study found that safe storage practices were associated with up to 85% reductions in the risk of self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries among children and teenagers.

I didn't have the privilege to feel safe from firearm-inflicted injury when I was younger. The fear of weapons that could kill me in an instant was real, it was rational, and it was very prevalent. It still is today. I'm ready to live in a world where I'm not plagued by the fear of firearms around every corner. That's why I urge you to support LD 379, An Act To Protect Children by Requiring the Safe Storage of Loaded Firearms.