

Maine gun safety COALITION

Maine Gun Safety Coalition
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Testimony of Geoff Bickford, Executive Director, Maine Gun Safety Coalition in support of L.D. 1312.

Senator Carpenter, Representative Bailey, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Geoff Bickford and I am the executive director of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition. It has been an honor to stand with the broad coalition of groups that have worked tirelessly to fight for L.D. 1312.

Founded in 2000, the Maine Gun Safety Coalition is the state's longest-standing gun safety organization. We represent thousands of supporters across the state who stand in favor of commonsense, bipartisan gun safety measures that save lives and at the same time respect the rights of gun owners. L.D 1312 checks both of those boxes and that is why we strongly support this bill. It is also the reason why the Maine Chiefs of Police, the Maine chapter of the American Federation of Suicide Prevention, the Maine chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, as well as doctors, teachers, lawyers, social workers, survivors and victims do too.

Beyond directing the Gun Safety Coalition, I also come to you today as someone who began target shooting with my dad at eight years old, and who continues to do so regularly to this day. I have spent countless hours shooting on the range, cleaning and refurbishing antique firearms, and reloading ammunition, side by side with my father. It is a tradition I can't wait to share with my own son. I know guns, I own guns, I know the Second Amendment and the rights of gun owners. In fact, many Maine Gun Safety Coalition supporters are gun owners, hunters and sport shooters. If I get no other point across today, I want to make one thing clear. SAM, the NRA, the Gun Owners of Maine do not speak for me and they do not speak for us. Across this state there are thousands of gun owners who support this bill. They know it saves lives. They know it prevents suicides. They know it can prevent the next mass shooting. They know it is a tool that law enforcement wants to keep their communities safe.

And here's who else does: The vast majority of the voting public of this state. As we have seen in two recent statewide polls, more than 80 percent of Maine voters support this law. That includes 70 percent of Republicans in both polls.

I also come to you as a former public defender. For a number of years, I represented thousands of people charged with crimes. I know the importance of due process – I fought for it for my clients. You will hear time and time again today that this bill violates due process. Do not be confused. It does not. Many parts of our legal system have, from the founding of our country, depended on *ex parte* proceedings. Today, you can be taken into custody when one person swears out a criminal complaint and a judge issues an arrest warrant on that basis. You can be removed from your home, and yes, have your firearm taken away when one person makes allegations during a Protection From Abuse proceeding. This is no different. It cannot be said that we trust the courts when it comes to making decisions about someone's freedom, but not when it comes to temporarily restricting their access to firearms when there is a finding of credible allegations that someone is a threat to themselves or others.

On behalf of the thousands of supporters of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition, its Board of Directors, and myself, I urge you to support this bill, and help save lives.