

# Maine gun safety COALITION

March 17, 2017

## **Our Mission**

Maine Gun Safety Coalition promotes responsible gun ownership in order to create a safer Maine.

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Senator Rosen, Representative Warren, distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Nick Wilson and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition to LD 44.

By eliminating the requirement to obtain a permit, this bill will allow 18 to 20 year olds to carry loaded guns in public without a background check or completing a firearm safety course. We believe there is a significant difference between allowing 18 year olds and 21 year olds to carry guns without training, and that it is not too much to ask of a teenager who wants to carry a concealed gun to apply for a permit.

Compared to individuals in their mid-twenties, 18 year olds are more impulsive, thrill-seeking, and vulnerable to negative influences such as peer pressure. During these pivotal years, adolescents also typically begin experimenting with alcohol and drugs – both important risk factors for gun violence.

Advancements in functional MRI technology over the past decade have allowed neuroscientists to confirm the results of decades of behavioral studies: the brain systems responsible for impulse control are still maturing during adolescence.

According to a 2013 report by the National Research Council, whose members are drawn from the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine, "research shows that an imbalance in developing brain systems is linked to adolescents' lack of mature capability for self-regulation, heightened sensitivity to external influences, and poorer ability to make decisions that require consideration of the future." This report commissioned by the US Department of Justice stated that "One can conclude from the body of behavioral and brain studies that adolescents clearly differ from adults in crucial ways that suggest the need for a different response from the justice system. One can also conclude that age 18 does not suddenly mark complete transition to adulthood."

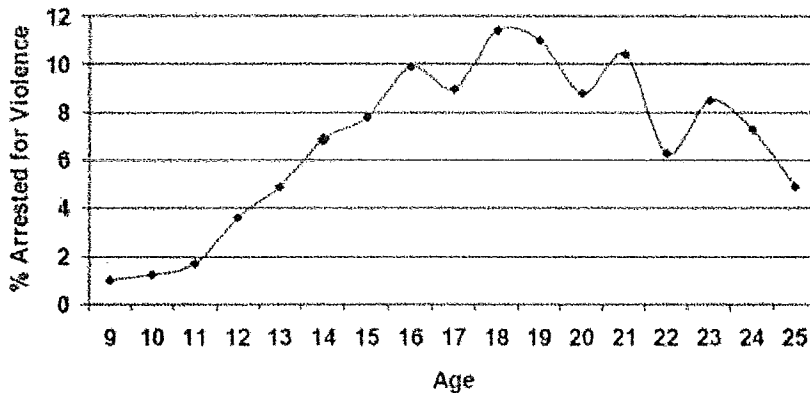
In addition to this consensus found in the medical and science community, there are lessons to be learned from private business. When I was 18, Hertz would have loved to have taken my money. However, most car rental companies require drivers to be at least 25 years old because adolescents on average have impulse control issues. They didn't have to wait for MRI technology – they just had to look at their insurance premiums to see that 18 year olds are not a good financial bet.

Eliminating the permit requirement means more 18 to 20 year olds will be carrying guns without understanding the basic regulations. Firearm safety training is about more than how to safely handle a firearm and prevent unintentional discharges. Before a teenager begins carrying a hidden firearm, they need to know the laws and regulations, such as prohibitions against displaying a gun in a threatening manner, when there is a duty to inform law enforcement that they are carrying a concealed gun, and where carrying guns are prohibited such as schools and Acadia National Park. It also takes a certain amount of maturity to know when to call the police instead of escalating a situation.

Do we really want more 18 and 19 year olds carrying guns without a background check or training? According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, homicide and drug-arrest rates peak at age 19. The National Institute of Justice website explains, "The prevalence of offending tends to increase from late childhood, peak in the teenage years (from 15 to 19) and then decline in the early 20s. This bell-shaped age trend, called the age-crime curve, is universal in Western populations" (see Figure 1 below). If this bill becomes law, we will likely see more gun violence among adolescents in Maine.

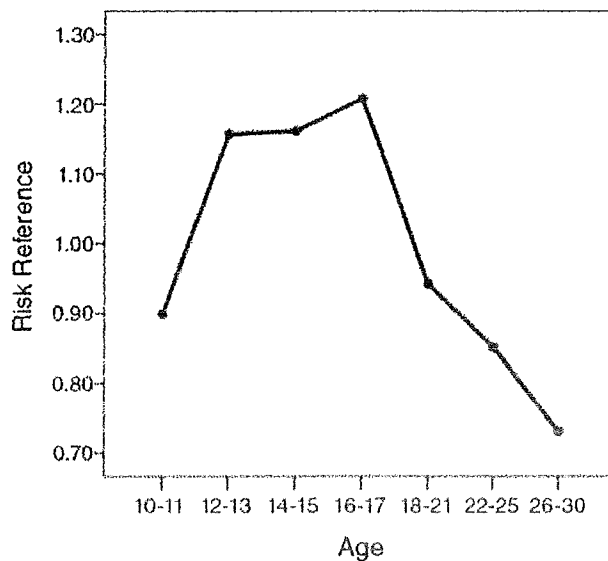
In addition to the many people in this room who came to oppose LD 44, I received several hundred messages from Maine citizens, mostly parents, all over the state who are truly horrified at the prospect of this extreme measure becoming law. It has only been 18 months since Maine's permitless concealed carry experiment went into effect. Both the Maine Chiefs of Police Association and the Maine Sheriffs Association opposed removing the permit requirement for adults, citing concerns that it would put the public and police at risk. Before the legislature once again changes our concealed carry laws, we ask that this committee first study the public safety impacts of the 2015 reforms.

**Figure 1: An Age-crime Curve**



Source: Loeber, Rolf, and Rebecca Stallings, "Modeling the Impact of Interventions on Local Indicators of Offending, Victimization, and Incarceration," in *Young Homicide Offenders and Victims: Risk Factors, Prediction, and Prevention from Childhood*, eds. Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington, New York: Springer, 2011: 137-152.

**Figure 2: Age Differences in Preference for Risky Behaviors**



Source: National Research Council, *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach*, 2013