

Governor Janet T. Mills Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
State of the State Address Part 2
Delivered at the Maine State House, Tuesday, January 30, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

Introduction

Mr. President, Madam Speaker, Madam Chief Justice, distinguished members of the 131st Legislature, members of my extraordinary cabinet, and honored guests.

Thank you for joining me tonight.

I am pleased to be joined by members of my cabinet, including Major General Douglas Farnham, who is retiring next month, and Brigadier General Diane Dunn, soon to become the first woman Commissioner of Veterans and Emergency Management.

Would you please join me in recognizing Major General Farnham’s nearly 40 years of decorated service and in welcoming Brigadier General Dunn?

I am also joined by my family, including my daughters Lisl and Tammy, my sister, Dr. Dora Mills and her children Anthony and Julia, and my brothers, Peter and Paul. Tonight, we are sadly missing my brother David, who passed away last Friday. I honor him tonight in my thoughts.

My approach to the State of the State this year is a departure from those of the past; a change from the tradition in which the Chief Executive stands before you to discuss a series of high-profile issues, challenges, and opportunities.

But a State of the State Address — true to its storied purpose — must be a reflection of the times — these times, especially these past few months — have been anything but normal for Maine.

Maine people value straight talk, so I will put it to you plainly: we have had a very rough couple of months. We have been sorely tested, time and again. We have some serious stuff to discuss.

In late October a gunman took the lives of 18 innocent citizens, from ages 14 to 76, and injured many more, physically and emotionally — in an act of senseless and unconscionable violence that devastated our communities and shook our sense of security — the worst mass shooting in Maine history and the tenth worst in our nation’s history.

Then, in December, another traumatic event hit us, as heavy rains and powerful winds brought massive flooding that destroyed homes and businesses, roads and bridges. Four people lost their lives.

In January, two more violent storms caused some of the highest tides ever, which swept fish houses into the sea, kicked pilings out from under once-sturdy piers, broke dunes and breakwaters, chewed up roads and sea walls, wiped storekeepers dry of stock and changed the very landscape of our coast.

These things break our hearts.

Maine people do not welcome crisis or disaster. But we will always rise to meet them.

In these difficult times — when it sometimes feels like we have little control over our fate and our future — the people of Maine have banded together in support of one another, our communities, and our state like never before.

And it is because of Maine people — because of their unyielding resilience and resolve in the hardest of times — that the State of our State is strong.

And it is because of you, the people of Maine, that I am more confident than ever before in the future of our state and in our ability to prepare for and overcome whatever challenges the future has in store.

Rebuilding from the Storm

What gives me cause for such optimism in the face of such loss and hardship?

Look no further than the simple acts of kindness, compassion, and generosity demonstrated by people across Maine in the wake of these recent storms.

When Doug Hartkopf's dairy barn in Albion was destroyed by powerful winds, his neighbors brought all his cows to safety and shelter.

When the fishing boat, the Tara Lynn II, ran aground on the rocks off Cape Elizabeth at the height of the storm, fire and rescue crews braved those rough seas twice in the middle of the night to rescue all four people on board.

And when the storms in January threatened to toss J.O. Brown's boatyard into the sea, that fixture that has withstood storms since 1855, the whole community stepped up to save it — young and old, neighbors, friends and family. When the storm receded, and the boatyard still stood strong and tall, owner Foy Brown said, "It worked. It worked because the whole town turned out for us."

Yes, that's what Maine people do — we take care of each other. We roll up our sleeves and rebuild.

With help from the Federal government and the support of this Legislature, and with the ingenuity and grit that are the hallmark of Maine people, we will rebuild stronger than ever.

Like other states feeling the brunt of extreme weather events, Maine is not safe from climate change. We know more storms will come.

And make no mistake about it, it *is* climate change that is causing storms to be more frequent, more intense, and more devastating.

The ocean is warming. The sea is rising. The winds are wilder. We no longer know the storms and winters of yesterday.

Because when we burn fossil fuels — like gasoline, oil, and natural gas — we expel harmful greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Those gases envelop our planet, trap heat and moisture, that melts ancient glaciers, raises sea levels, and increases global temperatures.

Scientists know this. Meteorologists know this. Farmers, fishermen, and foresters know this. Sportsmen know this. Our kids know this.

We all know this now.

We will address climate change in the long-term by investing in clean energy; by weatherizing homes and businesses; by expanding our state's network of EV chargers; and by advancing cleaner and more efficient technologies, like heat pumps – while also creating good-paying green collar jobs.

And informed by the work of the Maine Climate Council — scientists, citizens, business leaders, and state and local officials — we lead the nation in many of these respects. In fact, we have exceeded our original goal for installing heat pumps, and we've set a new, more ambitious one. And as a result of our clean energy initiatives, we are seeing significant capital investments that are creating new jobs and new businesses.

We have the fastest growing clean energy economy in New England.

We must, and we will, continue to address climate change in the long-term, for the health of our people, the health of our environment, and the health of our economy.

But we must also take immediate steps — right now — to make our towns, homes and businesses more resilient to climate change and these awful storms.

Thankfully, we have laid the groundwork for how we do that.

In 2021, with the support of the Maine Climate Council, we organized the Community Resilience Partnership, which helps communities plan for the impacts of climate change.

One hundred and seventy-five cities, towns and Tribal governments have taken part in this voluntary program — and the program has awarded more than six million dollars to them.

One of those communities is Rockland, a city that was hard hit by the recent storms.

Recognizing that its waterfront piers and seawall are deteriorating and in need of repairs, Rockland has used these resiliency funds not only to plan for the rebuild of the pier and seawall, but to make long-desired improvements to public spaces.

Having this plan gives Rockland a clear path forward to obtain other available funds to protect and strengthen its downtown waterfront.

This is important work. Cities and towns across Maine are on the front lines of climate change, and these recent storms underscore the importance of fortifying them in the long-term.

Tonight, I am proposing to add \$5 million to our Community Resilience Partnership to allow another 100 cities, towns, and Tribal governments to identify vulnerabilities to extreme weather events and be ready for the next storm, the next flood, the next washouts, the next threats to our bridges, piers and homes.

Let's give them the tools to continue this desperately needed work.

And let's turn those plans into real action.

In 2021, we created the Maine Infrastructure Adaptation Fund that provides grants to municipalities, Tribal governments, and others to improve infrastructure that is vulnerable to flooding, rising sea levels, and other extreme weather events — exactly the type of upgrades that will help communities better withstand the type of storms we are now seeing.

For example, in Kennebunkport, the town is using a grant to raise the road that leads to Bickford Island and the utilities beneath it and improve stormwater runoff, in order to mitigate the impacts of flooding, prevent road closures, and reduce disruption for commercial fishermen and the need for costly repairs.

In Winslow, they are replacing stormwater structures with larger ones that will handle more water, to reduce the risk of flooding and property damage.

These are commonsense projects that will strengthen our resiliency in the long run.

Tonight, I propose we bolster this Infrastructure Fund with \$50 million from our record high “Rainy Day Fund”, to allow Maine communities to build and rebuild infrastructure — roads, culverts, working waterfronts, storm water systems — that will be tough enough to withstand the impacts of climate change. Essentially, I propose taking from the Rainy Day Fund to respond to some pretty rainy days we've had and some rainy days ahead.

At the same time, we will seek every available federal dollar for disaster assistance and resiliency, but the sooner we pass the supplemental budget, the sooner we can get state funds to contractors and fishermen and towns to get things up and running once again before the height of fishing season.

As we recover and rebuild from past storms and as we prepare for those to come, so too will we recover and repair from those shocking events that have threatened our personal security, our community safety, and our very character as a state.

Public Safety

It is time to have a conversation about violence —

Violence in the media that pervades our subconscious.

Violence in homes, streets, towns, and schools.

Violence in America.

Violence abroad.

Violence that has become an all too common — and all too wrong — way to solve differences.

Violence that we know all too well this past year, on a scale previously unknown to us.

On Monday October 23rd Maine boasted that we were the safest state in the nation, with the lowest violent crime rate in the country, according to the FBI. We relished the easy comfort of this brand that attracts people to our state — the sense of personal safety, along with our natural beauty and the sense of place and community unmatched in other parts of the country.

But on October 25th, everything changed. Folks at Just-In-Time Recreation and at Schemengees Bar and Grill in Lewiston, simply doing what many Maine people do all the time — bowling with their kids, enjoying a cold beer and a game of cornhole after a long day at work, spending time with family and friends — had their lives shattered by gunfire.

Darkness descended on our state. Eighteen people lost their lives to a senseless act of violence. Many others were injured. Tens of thousands of people sheltered in place for several days. Restaurants, shops, retailers and public buildings were shuttered. College students locked themselves in libraries, dorms, and classrooms. Streets emptied. An eerie pall of silence enveloped our state.

But these moments of darkness were also punctuated by great heroism — heroism when Jason Walker, Michael Deslauriers, and Joe Walker rushed the shooter in a courageous attempt to stop him and lost their lives; or when Tom Giberti instinctively ushered a group of children out the back door of the bowling alley, getting shot himself seven times in the legs while saving those young lives; or when someone still unknown turned the lights off at Schemengees to obscure the shooter's vision.

And there was heroism as first responders came from far and wide to help, and when every doctor, nurse, and healthcare worker at Central Maine Medical Center answered the call of duty and did everything they could to save lives. And when ASL interpreters from near and far, though reeling from the loss of four of their own, stepped up in their own moment of grief to ensure that crucial information was delivered to those who are deaf and hard of hearing. And so many more.

Ordinary people demonstrating extraordinary courage — an example of the resilience and resolve of Maine people.

Tonight, we are joined by:

- Tom Giberti;
- and by Lewiston Police Chief David St. Pierre, Lisbon Police Chief Ryan McGee, and Maine State Police Lieutenant Colonel Brian Scott, all of whom worked with an incredible team of state, county, local and federal law enforcement officials;
- and by our wonderful ASL interpreters, Regan Thibodeau, Amanda Eisenhart and Julia Schafer who remain on the job today.

Please join me in acknowledging them all this evening, in recognizing their heroism and that of their loved ones, and in honoring the memories of those we lost.

Know that Maine people are standing by your side, offering what comfort we can in a moment of immeasurable pain, though we know that the pain and hardship of October's tragedy will last a lifetime.

In recognition of that, I propose that we create a fund, similar to the one created in Virginia last year, to cover the medical needs of those injured last October long into the future and I propose that we capitalize it with an initial investment of \$5 million.

We know the road to healing will be long, but we will help you walk it.

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We also know that many Maine people still feel a lingering sense of anxiety and vulnerability, a feeling of being unsafe.

Our calm complacency has been shaken to the core.

I know there are some who may prefer to consider the shootings an aberration, the product of one unstable individual who went on an unconscionable rampage that is unlikely to reoccur.

But many felt it was unlikely to occur before October 25th happened.

And honestly, the hope that it won't happen again is of little comfort to the children, grandchildren, wives, partners, and parents who in an instant lost a loving spouse or child, a breadwinner, or a staple of the community, and who now face an uncertain future without them.

It gives no comfort to the people of our second largest city and its surrounding towns, or to all the businesses, schools, shops, and homes where a shooter on the run required them to shelter in place for 48 terrifying hours.

It gives no comfort at all to the people last April who were shot by a violent felon, recently released from prison, while they were simply driving down a public highway minding their own business, this after he had already killed his parents and two other people in their home.

It gives no comfort to the families who have lost loved ones to the tragedy of suicide or domestic violence.

Yes, we are different than other states, but violence does exist here in the State of Maine — and it strikes at the very heart of who we are and everything we hold dear for this precious place we call home.

I have heard some say that no matter the law, a dangerous person will always find a way, and no new laws can prevent that. There is some truth to that: a person who is intent on doing harm to themselves or to someone else for whatever reason, may well succeed.

But the idea that we should not make laws because they will just be broken creates a cynical attitude that certain bad things are just inevitable.

I for one refuse to give in to that idea, and I refuse to let it stop us from taking action.

Some have said, well it's really just a mental health issue; that we just need to "fix" our behavioral health system and this violence will end. Well, certainly there may be people with mental health issues who commit violent crimes. But the vast majority of people with those issues do not commit violent crimes, and it would be wrong to stereotype anyone who has mental health problems as a potentially violent individual.

I have heard some say that we should not do anything until the Independent Commission finishes its work. They are right that the findings of that Commission may very well result in conclusions that need a policy remedy, and we will welcome the Commission's conclusions when they are ready. But "fixing" our laws to address a single attack does nothing to anticipate those other acts of violence which we might, with wise actions, prevent.

Actions which might also restore our sense of personal safety; actions whose time I believe has come.

Because, for the sake of the communities, individuals and families now suffering immeasurable pain, for the sake of our state, doing nothing is not an option.

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Throughout my time in office, I have tried to bring people together — lawmakers, law enforcement, public health, and others — to achieve enduring reforms that strengthen public safety, that protect our Constitutional rights, and that honor Maine's longstanding outdoor traditions.

And you, on a bipartisan basis, have agreed. Together, we have enacted:

- laws that allow judges to remove weapons from people under domestic violence orders;
- laws to ensure that survivors of domestic violence are notified if their abuser tries to obtain a firearm;

- penalties for straw purchases of firearms;
- incentives for the safe storage of firearms;
- funding for the Maine School Safety Center to help make our schools safe;
- and an extreme risk protection law to remove weapons from someone who's a danger to themselves or others, with appropriate due process protections.

These commonsense measures were not easy to achieve; they were the product of great discussion and debate. But, together, we got them done. And to me, they are the type of pragmatic and responsible solutions that we can also achieve *this* session.

In recent months, my office has talked with Republican and Democratic lawmakers and with people and organizations across Maine, listening to ideas and concerns and trying to develop a balanced approach to this difficult issue.

What I heard from folks all across the state is that they recognize the problem of gun violence. They see it in acts of domestic violence, suicide, and mass shootings.

Each person had ideas about what we could do to address the problem, and each of these ideas was different.

But what was not different — what was largely agreed upon — was an overarching belief that violence prevention is important; that we must strengthen our mental health system; and that dangerous people should not have access to firearms.

Out of these discussions, tonight I am announcing that I will be filing legislation to address these three areas of concern — legislation that would implement meaningful public safety protections, that would honor the rights afforded by our state and federal constitutions to safe and legal gun ownership, and that would uphold our state's longstanding outdoor heritage.

Prevention

First, let's talk about prevention.

Many states have programs that approach the issue of violence through the broader lens of public health in order to understand and address long-term trends.

Maine is not one of those states, and I would like to change that.

Right now, data about violent injuries and deaths is kept separately — in police reports, medical examiner files, vital records, emergency department files — which are not easy to understand and analyze.

Tonight, I propose we establish an Injury and Violence Prevention Program at the Maine CDC as a central hub to bring together all this information already collected by diverse sectors such as health care, education, social services, and criminal justice agencies.

Bringing together these data will allow us to identify patterns to inform public health and prevention measures to reduce suicides and homicides in Maine.

Let's do a better job at preventing violence to begin with, to make Maine a safer state.

Mental Health

Now, let's talk about mental health.

As I mentioned earlier, Maine — with almost unanimous, bipartisan support — enacted an extreme risk protection law that allows a court to order the removal of dangerous weapons from an individual determined by a mental health professional to be a risk to themselves or others.

Law enforcement must first take a person into protective custody, at which point they undergo a mental health evaluation, and a judge issues a decision on whether to temporarily remove their weapons.

This law has come under intense scrutiny since the Lewiston shooting, which is appropriate. It is always right to question whether our laws are adequately serving their intended purpose and whether more, if anything, can be done to change or strengthen them.

For example, some have questioned the necessity of a mental health evaluation — suggesting that it is an unnecessary hurdle that only makes the removal of weapons more difficult.

But I believe that the mental health assessment strengthens our law, protecting due process rights, making it more constitutionally sound and less subject to being struck down if anyone were to challenge it. And it also serves as a doorway to mental health services that might not otherwise be available.

This law has been used 94 times in the past 97 days since October 25th. In other words, nearly once a day since the shooting in Lewiston in courts all over the state — about 15 times more than it had been used in the preceding three years that it has been on the books.

The law is being used, and it is working.

This is not to say that we cannot strengthen the law.

For example, we know that, even with the progress we have made in recent years to expand behavioral health services, access to services can still be a serious struggle.

I want to expand behavioral health services across Maine, particularly for those in crisis.

So, I propose that we establish a network of crisis receiving centers across Maine so that any person suffering a mental health crisis can get prompt and appropriate care, instead of being alone or languishing in an emergency department or a jail, as is too often the case.

And I want to establish the next receiving center in Lewiston, which I will fund in the forthcoming supplemental budget.

My bill will direct the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to expand these receiving centers, over time, into a broader network and provide greater access to services for people.

We know these centers work. My Administration, with your support, opened the first center in Portland in February of 2022. In twenty months, nearly 3,000 people visited the center to get help and resolve a crisis. Since then, we have also announced plans to create a hybrid crisis receiving center in Kennebec County that also offers substance use treatment.

Crisis receiving centers work – Let’s build on them.

Keeping Weapons Out of the Hands of Dangerous People

Now, let’s talk about how we can keep weapons out of the hands of people who should not have them.

We know that in the case of the Lewiston shooter, law enforcement officers were not able to take him into protective custody to initiate our extreme risk protection order law to remove his weapons.

Whether law enforcement could have or should have done something different is a question that is being heavily scrutinized.

But, to me, the fact that they were not able to do so reveals a gap that must be addressed.

What happens in the circumstance when law enforcement knows where a person is but is unable to take them into protective custody, and still believes they pose a likelihood of serious harm to themselves or others?

My proposal will close that gap by allowing law enforcement to seek the approval of a judge, in unusual circumstances, to take a person into protective custody and, if deemed dangerous by a medical practitioner and a judge, remove their weapons, pending a full court hearing.

This will remove a barrier by providing law enforcement with another tool to ensure that someone is taken into protective custody and their weapons are removed.

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This strengthens the ability of law enforcement to remove weapons from dangerous people who already own them. But what about preventing dangerous people from getting a weapon in the first place?

I think we can address this, too.

When a person is subject to our extreme risk protection law, their name is entered into a national database of persons prohibited from having firearms, a database which includes convicted felons and people subject to a domestic violence protection order, among others — in other words, people who we can all agree should not have a dangerous weapon.

This is a process that works well if the individual attempts to purchase a weapon from a Federally-licensed firearm dealer — from your local gun shop or Cabela's or L.L. Bean, for example. The dealers are required to verify that a person is legally allowed to buy a weapon through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, known as NICS.

If that person is in NICS, they are a prohibited person. The system flags them, and the sale is denied.

But it is not a process that works well when that very same person can walk out of the gun shop and go to Facebook Marketplace, to Craigslist, or to Uncle Henry's and purchase, through a private commercial sale, the same weapon they were just denied — a weapon they are not legally allowed to have.

In 2016, the question was put to Maine people through referendum whether they wanted to close this so-called private sale loophole. At the time, they rejected it, and that vote has framed my approach to the larger question since then.

But now, in the aftermath of the violence we have seen across Maine, I have asked myself whether this approach is still right.

And I have arrived at the conclusion that I do not know how we can allow people who legally cannot have guns to buy them through a private sale and pose a risk to themselves or the public.

And I do not know how we can hold commercial sellers to a higher standard while allowing an underground market of private sellers to advertise guns for sale without any restrictions.

In my conversations with Maine people, I believe they agree. People who can't legally own guns should not have such easy access to them.

I believe the time has come to address the issue of private gun sales.

I propose two things. One, that we require any sale of a firearm that is advertised — through Facebook, Craigslist, Uncle Henry's, a gun show, and other means — to be checked against the NICS system, the same system used by licensed firearm dealers.

In doing so, we will ensure that when a gun is sold through an advertised sale, it cannot be sold to someone who is prohibited from having a firearm.

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Now, secondly, you are probably wondering: what about sales that are purely private and not advertised? It's a good question, and it's one I have thought a lot about.

These are the types of transfers that are most often from one family member to another, from one neighbor to another, or from one trusted friend to another.

In other words, the type of safe transfer among law-abiding gun owners that is common in our state.

But we also have to acknowledge that someone could sell a weapon — again, privately and unadvertised — without knowing whether the buyer is legally allowed to own a weapon.

I want to encourage people to make damn sure that if they are selling a firearm to someone they don't know, then they should know that that person is legally allowed to own a gun.

And that is something we can do in a way that respects our longstanding tradition of passing down family firearms from one generation to the next or from one law-abiding gun owner to another.

Now, please forgive me in advance — but this is where the former Attorney General in me is going to come out.

Right now, it is a crime in Maine — a misdemeanor — for someone to intentionally or knowingly sell a firearm to someone who is a prohibited person.

Intentionally or knowingly. A lot is riding on whether or not you actually know.

I don't think that's the right approach. It's too loose a standard.

Because the bottom-line is: you *should* know. And most gun owners would want to know. It's common sense.

It's the right thing to do.

Let's change our law a bit to reflect that.

Tonight, I am proposing that we expand our law, that we improve it — by adding the term “recklessly” to intentionally or knowingly — making it a stronger standard and making it easier to successfully prosecute anyone who sells a gun to someone who is not allowed to have one.

And then, on top of that, I propose that we toughen the law to make that type of illegal sale a felony — not just a misdemeanor.

What does all of this mean in practicality?

It means if you're transferring a firearm to a relative or a friend who you know is allowed to own one, you have nothing to worry about. Nothing changes. This longstanding tradition in Maine remains the same.

But it also means if you are selling to a stranger, you should visit a licensed firearm dealer to check the NICS system, and make sure they are not a prohibited person.

Because "I'm sorry I didn't know" just isn't going to fly like it used to, and you won't want a felony charge and the possible prison time that comes along with it.

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Now, I know this is a lot so let me recap:

1. Let's strengthen violence prevention by establishing an Injury and Violence Prevention Program at the Maine CDC;
2. Let's expand our crisis mental health system;
3. Let's keep weapons out of the hands of dangerous people by:
 - strengthening our extreme risk protection law;
 - and by requiring those who advertise guns for sale to check the NICS system;
 - and by toughening our law that makes it illegal to transfer a firearm to a prohibited person.

Prevention. Mental health. And keeping weapons away from dangerous people.

That's what my proposal boils down to.

I recognize that, on the one hand, this legislation may be too little to those who believe more is needed, while, on the other hand, it may be too much to those who believe the opposite.

But violence is not a simple problem, nor is the remedy a single, simple measure. And these proposals represent progress, and they do not trample on anybody's rights.

They are practical, common-sense measures. They are not extreme or unusual. They are not a cookie cutter version of another's state's laws; they are Maine-made and true to our culture and our longstanding traditions while meeting today's needs.

If you are a law-abiding citizen who owns firearms in Maine, you have nothing to fear.

If you are a collector of firearms in Maine, you have nothing to fear.

If you like to hunt in Maine — deer, bear, moose, duck, pheasant, coyotes — you have nothing to fear.

And, if you are a 14-year-old kid bowling with your dad on a weeknight in Lewiston, you too should have nothing to fear.

If you are a truck driver, a postal carrier, or an ASL interpreter with a young wife and four kids at home, or a delivery driver taking an evening off to play cornhole with friends, you should have nothing to fear.

If you are a 35-year-old father of two with another on the way who just got his Bachelor's degree from USM, out for a bite to eat with friends, you should have nothing to fear.

Over the past several months, I have been to too many funerals; expressing the condolences of all of you to the loved ones of too many lost too soon; and I have sat with myself — and my own conscience — reflecting upon what is right for Maine in the wake of Lewiston, of Bowdoinham, and of the tragedies of suicide and domestic violence that are all too prevalent in our society.

I hope that you, too, as the elected officials of the people, will do the same, reflecting not only on what you may think is best — but on what those who disagree with you believe is best as well.

The issue of guns in America is often marred by acrimony and divisiveness — tending to polarize people of goodwill, further entrenching people in already deeply held beliefs, hardening our uncharitable opinions of one another, and widening a great divide that only serves to immobilize us and obscure solutions.

Let us not lose our way in the vitriol and heated rhetoric that too often accompanies these debates; but let us have substantive, respectful, and vigorous discussions and arrive at solutions that work for our state and our people.

It is worth doing for the victims of yesterday's horrors, the survivors of today and the vulnerable of tomorrow. It is worth doing:

- for Ron Morin, Peyton Brewer-Ross, Josh Seal, Bryan MacFarlane, Joe Walker, Arthur Strout, Maxx Hathaway, Steve Vozzella, Thomas Ryan Conrad, Michael Deslauriers II, Jason Walker, Tricia Asselin, William Young, Aaron Young, Bob Violette, Lucy Violette, Billy Brackett and Keith Macneir.
- And for Cynthia Eaton, David Eaton, Robert Eger, and Patricia Eger.
- for the people who took their own lives, and those who were killed by an abuser.
- for their families and friends, who now have to live with the unimaginable pain that comes from losing a loved one to violence.
- And for anyone who survived that violence but who can never fully heal.

We have a lot of work to do in this body, creating and debating proposals that are balanced and measured, with care and with dignity. But it is worthwhile because one of the fundamental obligations of government is to keep people safe.

Closing

As I close, I cannot escape the troubling fact that violence has become all too common in our culture.

Acts of brutality, cruelty, and anger are glorified and normalized in video games, television shows, and social media — acts that reduce our humanity, that leave us angry and bitter towards one another, part of a culture that too often promotes violence as a way to address — but never really resolve — our differences.

As a society, we must consider how we can reject the vitriol that too often consumes us; how we can tune out the rhetoric of rage; how we can recognize the humanity and dignity of others through our own eyes; and how we can lead with grace, compassion, and understanding in our own private and public lives.

We cannot legislate all of this.

Instead, the true solution lies in our hearts, in the lessons we impart to our children, in our daily interactions with each other, in our spiritual faith, as a people who, despite our many differences, truly have more in common than we know — we who walk this same earth, breathe this same air, striving for purpose, happiness, the chance to love and be loved, to be safe, and, perhaps, to make just a small, positive difference in our short, blessed time on this earth.

My friends, we cannot, this month, this spring, alone, heal every damaged life or broken heart or pretend that we are immune from acts that tear us apart; nor can we repair each broken brick of every damaged bridge, replace every washed-out culvert, reweave our wooden wharves, or reimagine the contours of our coast in a single moment.

We will never forget Lewiston, but neither will we let October 25th define us. We have to embrace each other and believe in each other every day. We are still a civil, safe and welcoming state, with a backbone as strong as Katahdin. We are who we always have been — a people with a deep and abiding sense of right and wrong, determined to look out for one another, knowing how very lucky we are to live in this beautiful state.

So we will repair this scar of violence on our communal soul, just as we rebuild our wharves, beaches and bridges, with a cohesive will and a consciousness of the future. As we fortify our state against the ravages of unpredictable storms and the predictability of climate change, so will we restore and strengthen our sense of personal security and collective safety, based on reality and on the principles of the Golden Rule, protecting others as we would protect ourselves, in our state and in our nation.

And fundamentally, we will continue to look within ourselves and to each other for the confidence, courage and compassion to face the future, to weather things we have never weathered before, to defeat the dangers of today and prevent the disasters of tomorrow, as we replenish our souls and renew our indomitable sense of hope — one people, made up of many, with one purpose, one broad vision — to be the best we can for ourselves, for our family, for each other, and for our state.

I know that we can, because we are, all of us, the people of the great state of Maine.

And the state of our people is good. And the State of our State is strong.

As always, it is ever an honor and privilege to serve as your Governor.

Thank you.