

Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence
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Testimony of Adelyn Allchin, Director of Public Health Research
Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence
In support of A1217 Extreme Risk Protective Order Act of 2018
Before the New Jersey Assembly Judiciary Committee
February 28, 2018

Chair Quijano and Vice-Chair Lagana,

As the Director of Public Health Research for the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, I am writing today in support of **Assembly Bill 1217 – Extreme Risk Protective Order Act of 2018**. This bill would prohibit a person who poses a danger to self or others from owning, purchasing, possessing, receiving, or having in the respondent’s custody or control any firearms or ammunition for a temporary period. It would also prohibit the subject of the order from holding a firearms purchaser identification card, permit to purchase a handgun, and permit to carry a firearm.

Though New Jersey has some of the most comprehensive gun laws in the nation, there are times when an individual may be at risk of harming themselves or others and has access to a firearm, yet they are not subject to a qualifying state or federal firearm prohibition. An **Extreme Risk Protective Order** fills this gap.

Every day I examine the most current peer-reviewed research relating to risk of violence towards self or others, access to guns, and gun deaths. Using the best available evidence, we craft policies at the state and federal level to ensure individuals who are at highest risk of committing violent acts or harming themselves are prohibited from purchasing and possessing firearms while they remain in a high-risk period. From this research, we have learned that family and law enforcement are often first to know when an individual is in crisis and may be at risk of harming themselves or others, and that policies similar to the proposed **Extreme Risk Protective Order** can save lives.

Research shows that easy access to firearms increases the risk of dying by suicide.¹ Eighty-five percent of suicide attempts using firearms are lethal, whereas by comparison, more common suicide attempt methods such as poisoning and overdose are lethal only 2% of the time.²

¹ Miller, M., Barber, C., White, R. A., & Azrael, D. (2013). Firearms and suicide in the United States: Is risk independent of underlying suicidal behavior?. *American journal of epidemiology*, 178(6), 946-955.

² Miller, M., Azrael, D., & Barber, C. (2012). Suicide mortality in the United States: the importance of attending to method in understanding population-level disparities in the burden of suicide. *Annual review of public health*, 33, 393-408.

Consequently, reducing access to firearms increases the probability that an individual in crisis will survive a suicide attempt.

Research also shows that temporarily restricting access to firearms to individuals at a high risk of dangerous behavior is an effective policy. Notably, an evaluation of Connecticut's risk warrant law (a law similar to the proposed legislation) estimated that for every 10 to 20 risk warrants issued, one life is saved. Suicidality or self-injury was listed as a concern in greater than 61% of cases when information was available. Moreover, nearly one-third of risk warrant subjects received treatment in the public behavioral health system in the year following the issuance of a risk-warrant.³ This means that temporary risk-based firearms removal policies can not only save lives, but can also serve as a catalyst for individuals to receive desperately needed mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

The proposed **Extreme Risk Protective Order** legislation is based on a policy recommendation from the Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy (Consortium), a group of the nation's leading researchers, practitioners, and advocates in gun violence prevention and public health. Developed in 2013 after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, the report by the Consortium recommends Extreme Risk Protective Orders (known as Gun Violence Restraining Orders in the report) as a state-level strategy to reduce firearm violence towards self or others.⁴ And we agree wholeheartedly with this recommendation. The evidence is clear: access to guns while an individual is in crisis can create a deadly situation.

The proposed bill requires that firearms be temporarily removed for the duration of an **Extreme Risk Protective Order** to address this dangerous time where individuals are at a high risk of harming themselves or others. As the risk of violence diminishes and the order expires, the respondent may request the return of their firearms.

The cost of doing nothing is too great to bear. Over the last decade (2007-2016), 1794 people from New Jersey died by firearm suicide.⁵ The map on the following page shows the extent of firearm suicide in New Jersey from 2008-2014. The counties with the highest rates of firearm suicide during this time include: Sussex, Warren, Atlantic, Cape May, and Salem.

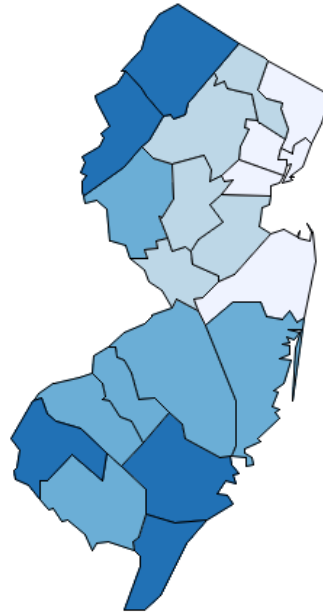
³ Swanson, JW, Norko, M, Lin, HJ, Alanis-Hirsch, K, Frisman, L, Baranoski, M, Easter, M, Gilbert, A, Swartz, M, & Bonnie, RJ. Implementation and Effectiveness of Connecticut's Risk-Based Gun Removal Law: Does it Prevent Suicides? (August 24, 2016). Law and Contemporary Problems. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2828847>

⁴ Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy. (2013). Guns, Public Health, and Mental Illness: An Evidence-Based Approach to State Policy. Available: <http://efsgv.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Final-State-Report.pdf>

⁵ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. Fatal Injury Reports 2007-2016, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED). Retrieved February 26, 2018 from <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/>

2008-2014, New Jersey
Death Rates per 100,000 Population

Firearm, Suicide, All Races, All Ethnicities, Both Sexes, All Ages
Annualized Crude Rate for New Jersey: 2.04



0.80-1.54 1.55-2.17 2.18-3.66 3.67-7.18

Reports for All Ages include those of unknown age.

* Rates based on 20 or fewer deaths may be unstable. These rates are suppressed for counties (see legend above); such rates in the title have an asterisk.

Produced by: the Statistics, Programming & Economics Branch, National Center for Injury Prevention & Control, CDC
Data Sources: NCES National Vital Statistics System for numbers of deaths; US Census Bureau for population estimates.

Fortunately, **Assembly Bill 1217** could reduce the burden of firearm suicide in New Jersey, as well as prevent firearm homicides. With the passage of this legislation, New Jersey would fill a gap in their laws by providing law enforcement and those closest to individuals at risk of harming themselves or others with the tools they need to save lives.

The evidence is clear: temporarily removing firearms from those at a high risk of committing violence will save lives and make the community safer. And as we have seen over the recent weeks, even the safest communities can be affected by gun violence. New Jersey has the opportunity to enact this evidence-based law, and I urge you to support **Assembly Bill 1217**, which creates a process for obtaining an **Extreme Risk Protective Order**.

Sincerely,
Adelyn Allchin, MPH
Director of Public Health Research
Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence