

Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence
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Testimony of Adelyn Allchin, Public Health Analyst, Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence
IN SUPPORT OF H.3081 AN ACT ESTABLISHING EXTREME RISK PROTECTIVE ORDERS
Before the Massachusetts Joint Committee on the Judiciary
July 18, 2017 at 1pm

Chair Brownsberger and Chair Cronin,

As a Public Health Analyst for the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence and native of Framingham, Massachusetts, I am writing today in support of House Bill 3081 - An Act establishing Extreme Risk Protective Orders (ERPOs). This bill would prohibit a person who poses a significant danger of causing physical harm to themselves, the petitioner, or anyone else from having in his or her custody or control, owning, purchasing, possessing, or receiving any firearms or ammunition for a period of up to 1 year.

Though Massachusetts 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 that is similar to the proposed legislation, estimated that for every 10 to 20 risk-warrants issued, one life is saved. 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 abuse treatment.

The proposed Extreme Risk Protective Order legislation is based on a policy recommendation from the Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy, a group of the nation's leading researchers, practitioners, and advocates in gun violence prevention and public health. The 2013 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 period 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 (2006-2015), nearly 1200 people from Massachusetts lost their lives to firearm suicide.⁵ The map on the following page shows the extent of firearm suicide in Massachusetts from 2008-2014. Barnstable County had the highest rate of firearm suicide, followed by Berkshire, Hampden, and Worcester Counties.

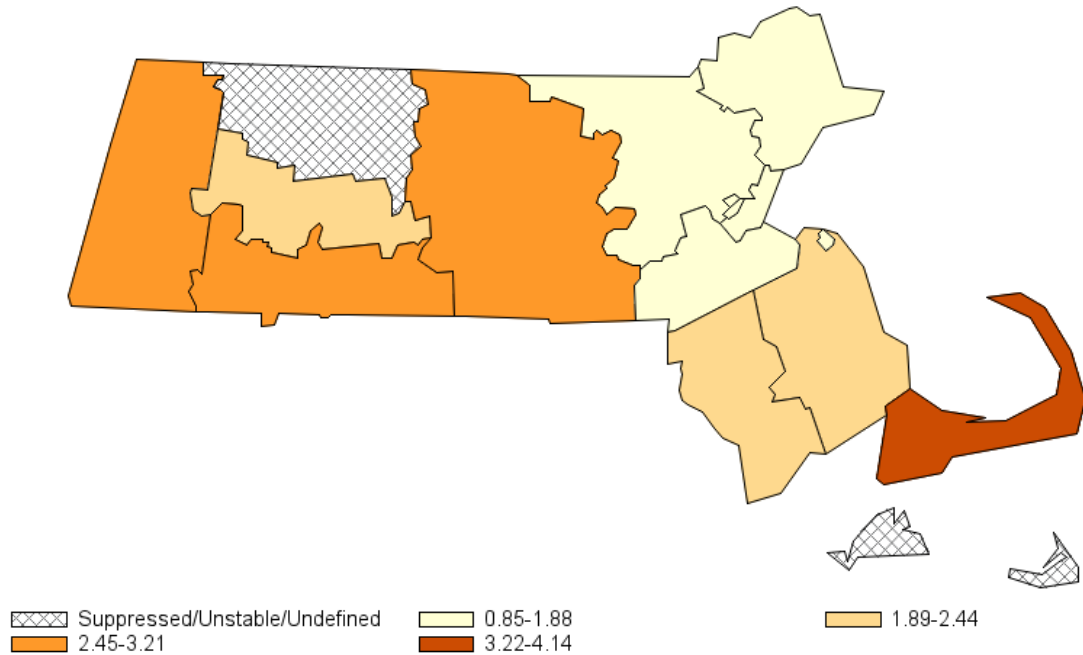
³ Swanson, JW, Norko, M, Lin, HJ, Alanis-Hirsch, K, Frisman, L, Baranoski, M, Easter, M, Gilbert, A, Swartz, M, & Bonnie, RJ. Implementation and Effectiveness of Connecticut's Risk-Based Gun Removal Law: Does it Prevent Suicides? (August 24, 2016). Law and Contemporary Problems. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2828847>

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 2006-2015, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED). Retrieved July 6, 2017 from <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/>

2008-2014, Massachusetts
Death Rates per 100,000 Population

Firearm, Suicide, All Races, All Ethnicities, Both Sexes, All Ages
Annualized Crude Rate for Massachusetts: 1.85



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, House Bill 3081 has the opportunity to reduce the burden of firearm suicide in Massachusetts, as well as prevent firearm homicides. With the passage of this legislation, Massachusetts 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. Massachusetts has the opportunity to establish evidence-based laws, and I urge you to support House Bill 3081, which creates a process for obtaining an Extreme Risk Protective Order.

Sincerely,
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