

Title:

The effect of Extreme Risk Protection Orders on the Concept of Voluntary Out-of-Home Firearm Storage: Results from a Qualitative Study in Two States

Authors:

Leslie Barnard, MPH, Research Assistant/Student, Department of Epidemiology Colorado School of Public Health

Chris Knoepke, PhD, MSW, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine, Division of Cardiology, University of Colorado School of Medicine

Megan McCarthy, Research Assistant, Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Colorado School of Medicine

Bonnie J Siry-Bove MSS Research Assistant, Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Colorado School of Medicine

Rachel L. Johnson, MS, Research Instructor, Department of Biostatistics & Informatics, Colorado School of Public Health

Sara Brandspigel, MPH, Director of Outreach, Injury and Violence Prevention Center, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

Lauren Rooney, MPH, Research Coordinator, Firearm Injury Policy and Research Center, Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center, University of Washington

Marian Betz, MD, MPH, Professor, Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Colorado School of Medicine

Abstract:

Purpose of Study: Reducing firearm access during a crisis can prevent suicide. Multiple states have developed storage maps identifying locations for voluntary, temporary out-of-home firearm storage. Non-voluntary options such as Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) allow designated “petitioners” to request the temporary restriction of firearm access for someone with imminent risk of harm to self or others. However, ERPO laws have been controversial, and their implementation occurred at the same time as voluntary programs. We sought to understand how ERPO laws impact views of voluntary storage options.

Methods: Between 10/2020 and 5/2021, the study team interviewed stakeholders in Colorado and Washington State, including firearm ranges and retailers, law enforcement agencies (LEAs), and public health and firearm rights organizations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded. We used a mixed deductive and inductive approach to code transcripts and analyzed coded data to identify dominant themes.

Summary of Results: We conducted 95 interviews with 100 participants (31 firearm retailers/ranges, 17 LEAs, 52 organizations). Themes about the effect of ERPOs on voluntary, temporary firearm storage were views or concerns that: (1) ERPOs further alienate those who might have sought or offered voluntary storage by (a) putting all parties (LEA and firearm owners) at risk of physical harm during enforcement and (b) their potential to be used inappropriately, and (2) voluntary storage providers may or may not be willing to store firearms resulting from an ERPO.

Conclusion: While both voluntary and non-voluntary firearm storage approaches can be used to reduce firearm suicide risk, the simultaneous presence of both options can raise challenges. Our study suggests the need to clearly distinguish between voluntary and non-voluntary storage. Understanding stakeholder views on voluntary and non-voluntary storage options support the development of acceptable and feasible programs for out-of-home firearm storage during times of suicide risk.