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Testimony regarding ERPO and other gun related legislation by James Vollrath immediate Past President of the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council.

Let me start by stating my background and experience. Since the age of twelve I have been a safe hunter in the fields and forests of Pennsylvania. Entering into the service of our great country in 1981 as a Gunners mate in the U S Navy working as an armorer training and educating service members in the safe and proficient handling of firearms. I became a certified Pennsylvania Game Commission Hunter Safety instructor in 1988 now with over 25 years' experience in educating perspective hunters in the safe handling of firearms at home and in the field. I currently have over 27 years' experience as a correctional officer/supervisor at a maximum-security county facility. And lastly, I am the father of two adult children who were raised with firearms in the home.

I am not here to discuss a "GUN PROBLEM" as there are many other factors involved that serve to create a "PROBLEM". Let me begin by stating the obvious that a gun is nothing more than an inanimate object unable to function and subject to the will of the person handling it. The subject of background checks is often heard as a battle cry for the misinformed. I personally have never been able to purchase a firearm where I have not filled out the appropriate forms and had to wait for the check to return whether the firearm was purchased in person or online, the background check had to be completed. A more appropriate battle cry would be "close the loop holes". As recent media reports would indicate, the central Pennsylvania area of Lancaster, York, and Harrisburg resembles the wild wild west in relation to the shootings taking place. But the media fell short in their reporting by not investigating the details such as how was the firearm obtained, any mental health related issues, family intervention or lack of, and the list could be endless. Irresponsible journalism in my opinion is just another factor in our current crisis as the whole picture is never portrayed exposing all the underlying facts or issues.

The Extreme Risk Protection Order while on the surface appears to be a possible step forward but it is in implementation that these otherwise possible solutions fall short due to the cloud of controversy. There are many moving parts to the ERPO and I do not envy you in the road ahead. The main component with ERPO is mental health and the privacy issues as well as the stigma that has hindered mental health treatment since its beginning. From the veterans stand point many veterans refuse to seek mental health treatment for fear of losing their firearms. These are people who have sworn an oath to protect our country and if they seek help for an invisible injury, they may lose part of their identity as a responsible person and for many this is unacceptable. As for the civilian side of this aspect privacy is also an issue. Many well-meaning clinicians are not able to see the bigger picture that every action has an equal and opposite reaction and when a person is in emotional/mental distress many actions are viewed as threatening and elicit a negative response. While attempting to acquire a measured response from the mental health perspective you will no doubt have many questions and road blocks from the implementation aspect of the ERPO concerning law enforcement from budgetary to implementation and storage then return of firearms to otherwise law-abiding citizens.

A critical aspect of the ERPO would be the engagement of family and community, and upon closer scrutiny would seem to be complicated due to fear of involvement for many reasons both real and perceived.

The driving force behind the ERPO would appear to be a 302 hearing (involuntary mental health commitment) and the many hurdles inherent to this process are staggering and sometimes seemingly inconsistent. I have personally witnessed many releases from incarceration to the hospital with a 302 commitment and the individual is back on the street before the transport detail returns to the correctional facility.

With the pending legislation of an Extreme Risk Protection Order I would encourage continued enforcement of existing gun laws and follow-up on firearms used in the commission of a crime and to not let the media drive the story.

Education begins in the home, unfortunately with the current state of family dynamic this is not as possible as it once was and will take thinking outside the box to facilitate a corrective action through legislation. I encourage everyone involved to approach this with an open mind and understanding in their hearts.

Respectfully,

James Vollrath

Immediate Past President

Pennsylvania War Veterans Council