



*Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
In Support of H.3610 - An Act temporarily preventing firearm access for extremely dangerous or
suicidal individuals*

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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts strongly supports H.3610, sponsored by Rep. Marjorie Decker, which addresses the guidelines for securing an Extreme Risk Protective Order (ERPO). ERPO is a civil order that allows a court to temporarily restrict access to firearms by persons who can pose significant danger of causing imminent personal injury to themselves or others.

The League of Women Voters of the United States states that “the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons in the United States is a major health and safety threat to its citizens.” The League supports “regulating firearms for consumer safety.” The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports this bill as one means to counter this major health and safety threat.

The most recent mass shooting in Parkland, FL, illustrates the critical need for such a “red flag” law. Seventeen lives were lost despite the warnings to law enforcement regarding the violent behavior demonstrated by the shooter. Law enforcement did not have the authority to remove the guns from the shooter. An ERPO law in Massachusetts would allow family members, law enforcement officials and medical personnel to petition the court to remove firearms temporarily.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control show that approximately 58 percent of Massachusetts gun deaths in 2016 were suicides, and 1,226 people from Massachusetts died by gun suicide in the last decade. Between 2000 and 2015, almost 3,500 people died by firearms in this state.ⁱ Dr. Jeffrey Swanson, a professor of psychiatry at Duke University, on behalf of The Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy, estimates that one life is saved for every ten or fifteen gun-seizure actions.ⁱⁱ

We are witnessing a national movement towards more effective gun safety and gun death prevention brought about by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students. More than one million students and allies “marched for their lives” on March 24, and 100,000 of those did so right here in Boston, with sister marches across the Commonwealth. We saw massive student protests for their safety in school on March 14, National School Walkout Day. The students of the Commonwealth need to be safe in school, and an ERPO law is a proven and effective way to remove firearms from those who are dangerous.

Public opinion indicates overwhelming support for red flag laws. In a public opinion poll of Massachusetts voters completed by WBUR radio on March 22, 2018, 89 percent favored prohibiting people found to be a risk to themselves or others from owning or possessing guns. Moreover, “69 percent believe protecting citizens from gun violence should be the most

important thing to lawmakers as they consider gun legislation.”ⁱⁱⁱ Florida is the sixth state to pass a red flag law, and similar laws are pending in 22 states and the District of Columbia.

The Massachusetts Major City Chiefs of Police organization has endorsed the bill. They see this as a tool to save more lives from suicide and homicide.

Massachusetts has the strictest gun laws in the United States. Passing this ERPO bill would close a loophole to protect the health and safety of all Massachusetts residents. The LWVMA urges the committee to report this bill favorably and swiftly.

Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. Massachusetts Firearm Deaths and Rates per 100,000. *Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2015 for National, Regional and States*.

http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqras/fatal_injury_reports.html.

ⁱⁱ *Guns, Public Health and Mental Illness: An Evidence-Based Approach for State Policy* copyright 2013 Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy

ⁱⁱⁱ Norton, Michael, Poll: *Mass Voters Favor Tougher Gun Laws, Red Flag Bill*. **The Lowell Sun**. 3/22/2018