

Extreme Risk Protection Order, a step in the right direction to address suicide.

I am an active hunter, gun owner and believer in my right to bear arms. I have been struggling the last several years with our countries lack of action towards suicide prevention and addressing the mass murders which have occurred all too often in our country. I am pleased to see our government is taking some action on the subject of suicide prevention and I am hopeful within the required research and resulting actions something is done relative to access to firearms in the first place.

While evaluating the current programs, at-risk individuals, barriers and areas of improvement this task force must look at the current facts and consider legislation addressing common sense changes to the access of firearms.

The vast majority of gun deaths in 2017, both in Wisconsin and nationally, were not the result of well-publicized mass killings or other criminal acts. Most were perpetrated by aging white men in lonely isolation who turned the guns on themselves.

According to recently released data from the Centers for Disease Control , the nation as a whole saw a record 39,773 gun deaths in 2017, the most ever in the 20 years of data. Of those, 23,854, or 60 percent, were suicides.

In Wisconsin, 624 people died by gunfire in 2017 — down from a record 664 in 2016 — with 70 percent of those turning the guns on themselves.

The rise of gun deaths in the state coincides with a loosening of gun restrictions starting in 2011 that made it easier to buy and carry firearms. Some see the subsequent increase in concealed carry permits, handgun purchases and the repeal of a 48-hour waiting period for firearms purchase as a contributing factor in the worsening carnage.

“Wisconsin is a bit higher than the national average for ownership, and our rate of suicide reflects that,” “Where there are more guns, there are more suicides.”

If the Task Force on Suicide Prevention is going to be successful it must take an honest look into the recently proposed Extreme Risk Protective Order legislation in other states.

Recent years have seen a number of mass shootings in which family members or friends noticed warning signs that shooters were dangerous and at risk of harming themselves or others. In response to these tragedies, states have begun enacting lifesaving tools that can prevent gun tragedies before they occur. Extreme risk protection order (ERPO) laws empower families, household members, or law enforcement officers to temporarily remove a person's access to firearms before they commit violence.

States that have enacted ERPO laws have seen positive results.

- An analysis of Connecticut's ERPO-style law—called risk warrants—found that it was highly effective at identifying individuals who were at the highest risk for suicide and had access to guns. Researchers found that individuals subject to risk warrants were 40 times more likely to die by suicide and for every 10 to 20 orders issued, one life is saved. In 99 percent of cases where a risk warrant was issued, police officers found at least one gun and removed an average of seven guns per individual.

I understand the sensitivity relative to any form of gun legislation but I also understand we have a very serious situation on our hands. Limiting access to guns needs to be part of the conversations going forward.

Continuing to deny guns and access to them have ^{something} ~~nothing~~ to do with the problems we face is not realistic. The task force must take a serious look at the facts and take action based on these facts.

This bi-partisan effort is a great start in working together to create programs and common-sense legislation to address a concern which impacts all the citizens of our state.