



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI Wisconsin

NAMI WISCONSIN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SPEAKER'S TASK FORCE ON SUICIDE PREVENTION PUBLIC HEARING ON SEPTEMBER 9TH, 2019

NAMI Wisconsin would like to say thank you to the Chairs of the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention, Rep. Ballweg and Rep. Doyle. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony at this public hearing. NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization providing advocacy, education, support and public awareness. NAMI Wisconsin is the state affiliate of NAMI and supports 29 local chapters with a membership of around 1,6000 people. Together, our mission is to improve the quality of life of people affected by mental illness and to promote recovery.

NAMI is grateful to the Task Force for exploring *why* suicide is increasing and *who* is at risk. We also urge you to explore deeply *how* it is increasing. Suicide is a public health crisis that is close to the hearts of the community we serve. Despite what the media may portray, suicide, not homicide is the greatest link between guns and mental illness. Most people with mental illness pose no risk at all to themselves or others, however, in the event of a mental health crisis where an individual is experiencing suicidal ideation, access to lethal means can make the difference between life and death.

Facts about suicide:

- **Suicide attempts using a firearm are fatal 90 percent of the time, while all other methods have a fatality rate of 3%.ⁱ**
- **A moment of intervention can save lives.** Studies show that 93% of the people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide.ⁱⁱ
- **In Wisconsin, 72% of all firearm deaths are suicides.ⁱⁱⁱ** The role of firearms must be part of the overall plan for suicide prevention.
- **Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO)** put in place a legal procedure – with due process - for family, friends or law enforcement to ask a court to have firearms temporarily removed from a person who is at risk of harm to self or others.^{iv}
- **ERPO has been used in other states** to prevent mass shootings, but in states where it has been used the longest, suicide is the risk that is most often reduced.
- **Like other Wisconsinites, many NAMI members own firearms.** We believe in responsible gun ownership and safe storage, but we also see the need for temporary removal of firearms when a person is at risk of harm to self or others.

NAMI Wisconsin urges the Task Force to introduce an Extreme Risk Protection Orders as one way to reduce suicide rates in Wisconsin. Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment and working to save lives. Questions can be directed to Crystal Hester, Public Policy & Advocacy Director at NAMI Wisconsin: crystal@namiwisconsin.org or 608-268-6000.

References

ⁱ Brady Campaign & Brady Center. "Tools for Social Workers to Prevent Gun Violence."

<https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=YvR20CC6ORU%3D&portalid=0>

ⁱⁱ Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health. *Means Matter*. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Tuan WJ. Wisconsin Firearm Mortality, 2000-2014.

https://www.wisconsinmedicalsociety.org/_WMS/publications/wmj/pdf/116/4/194.pdf

^{iv} Gifford Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. *Extreme Risk Protection Orders*. <http://efsgv.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ERPO-FAQ-December-2017.pdf>