

ACTION TANK

June 10, 2022

Pennsylvania General Assembly Judiciary Members,

As Veterans, we know what it means to be unwavering in a mission. To curb Veteran suicide, our team has engaged with leading experts, those with lived experience, and community leaders. Our discovery has made one thing clear—Emergency Risk Protection Order (ERPO) legislation will save lives in Pennsylvania.

85% of suicide attempts with a firearm result in death, compared to 3% of drug overdose, the second most common form of attempted suicide. This lethality matters, as nine out of ten people who survive an initial suicide attempt will not die from suicide at a later date. The rate of suicides by firearm by Veterans and first responders is even higher than the general public with suicide accounting for more deaths than those lost in the line of duty.

There are several barriers with our current legal system to address this crisis. If there is a report of concerning behavior, there is a risk of permanent removal and inability to purchase firearms in the future, because of involuntary psychiatric hospitalization, known as a “302” commitment. This prevents delay in reporting until it is too late. ERPO does not strip rights; it prevents permanent restriction of firearm ownership. ERPOs provide law enforcement officials with a formal legal process to temporarily remove guns from dangerous situations if an individual poses a danger to themselves or others. This is a legal petition with due process to ensure the rights of firearm owners are protected. These orders are temporary and can be appealed.

Firearms are used in 68% of Veteran suicides, compared to 48% of our civilian counterparts.

If the General Assembly is serious about addressing Veteran suicide, we must have a legal tool to protect our brothers and sisters, without stripping their rights.

Under the revised language, family members may not petition the court themselves, but may bring concerning behaviors to law enforcement attention for further action. Therefore, Action tank would remain supportive of HB 1903 if it were narrowly amended to remove family members as an ERPO petitioner and have law enforcement as the sole petitioner.

Support this ERPO legislation to save the lives of Veterans in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Matthew Miclette, MPH, MS, RN
Executive Director

and the Veteran membership of Action Tank