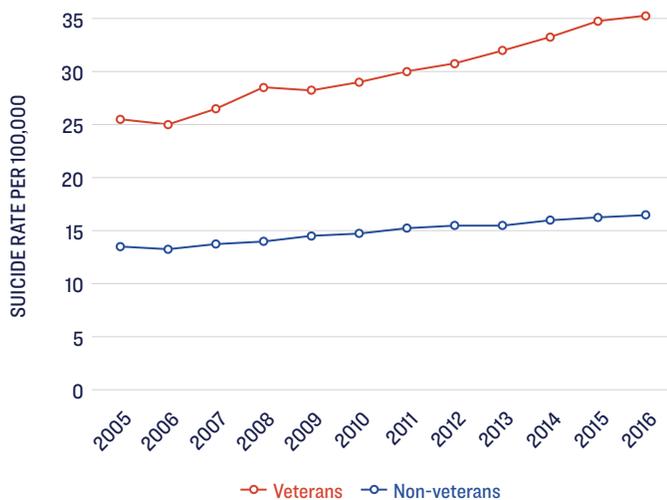


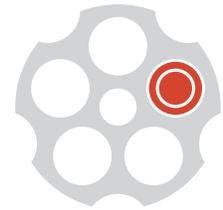
# VETERANS AND AMERICA'S GUN SUICIDE CRISIS

American veterans disproportionately shoulder the burden of our nation's gun suicide epidemic. More than 6,000 veterans die by suicide each year, and nearly 70% of these deaths involve firearms. **But these tragedies are preventable.** By enacting strong gun safety laws, we can help our veterans—and all Americans—overcome this public health crisis.

**SUICIDE RATES IN THE UNITED STATES ON THE RISE**



Over the last decade, **the suicide rate for veterans has been much higher and risen faster** than the suicide rate of the general population.<sup>5</sup> It is long past time that America take action to address its suicide crisis.

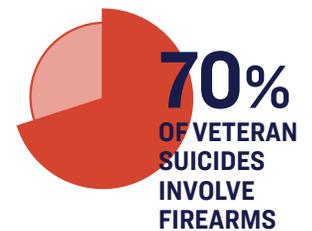


**OUR VETERANS DESERVE BETTER**

Suicide—and firearm suicide in particular—has a disproportionate impact on American veterans. **Veterans account for one in five adult firearm suicides.**<sup>1</sup>

**2x** The veteran suicide rate is more than **twice as high** as the non-veteran adult suicide rate.<sup>2</sup>

**32%** From 2007 to 2016, the veteran suicide rate increased by 32%. Increases were particularly dramatic among veterans ages 18 to 34.<sup>4</sup>



**UNIQUELY LETHAL**

Guns are by far the most common suicide method among veterans and non-veterans alike. **Nearly 70% of veteran suicides involve firearms**, and firearms are used in 50% of all suicides nationwide.<sup>3</sup>

# The Tragic Intersection of Guns and Suicide

## EASY ACCESS TO GUNS INCREASES SUICIDE RISK

Research suggests that having a gun in the home triples a person's overall risk of suicide,<sup>6</sup> and **nearly half of all veterans own firearms.**<sup>7</sup> Compared to the civilian population, veterans also suffer elevated rates of PTSD and other mental illnesses that are often associated with an increased risk of suicide and suicide attempts.<sup>8</sup>

## GUNS ARE A UNIQUELY LETHAL METHOD OF SUICIDE

For veterans and non-veterans alike, our country's suicide problem is a gun problem. **Firearms are the most lethal of the commonly available means of suicide in the US, which include sharp instruments and overdoses.** The vast majority of people who attempt suicide survive—unless they use a gun. While less than 5% of non-firearm suicide attempts result in death, approximately 85% of gun suicide attempts end in death.<sup>9</sup>

## SUICIDE ATTEMPTS ARE NOT USUALLY REPEATED

Suicide attempts are usually impulsive acts utilizing whatever methods are immediately available—48% of people harm themselves within 10 minutes of deciding to attempt suicide.<sup>10</sup> **Of those who survive a suicide attempt, the vast majority never attempt again, and 90% do not go on to die by suicide.**<sup>11</sup> By limiting access to guns among those at a proven risk of suicide, we can save thousands of American lives every year.

## Extreme Risk Protection Orders Save Lives

Extreme risk protection order (ERPO) laws allow families, household members, or law enforcement officers to petition a court for an order temporarily restricting a person's access to guns if they are deemed a danger to themselves or others. Because nearly 80% of those contemplating suicide show concrete signs before a suicide attempt,<sup>12</sup> **ERPO laws empower those most likely to notice warning signs to help remove firearms from people at a high risk of suicide.**

These laws have enormous lifesaving potential. Researchers estimate that by temporarily removing weapons from 762 at-risk individuals, an ERPO-like law in Connecticut averted up to 100 fatalities from suicide alone.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, in 44% of Connecticut's firearm removal cases, the request for an order to remove a gun resulted in the subject receiving psychiatric treatment they might not otherwise have received.<sup>14</sup>

So far, 11 states—California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington—have passed versions of ERPO laws. **More states need to follow their lead and take proactive steps to prevent gun suicide, which disproportionately impacts our veterans.** It is unacceptable that more than 6,000 men and women who put their lives on the line for this country take their own lives every year. We can, and we must, do better.

PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2018

Learn more about solutions to America's gun suicide crisis: [lawcenter.giffords.org/suicide](http://lawcenter.giffords.org/suicide)

# [giffordslawcenter.org](http://giffordslawcenter.org)

FACEBOOK /Giffords TWITTER @GiffordsCourage

## 280+

lifesaving gun safety laws have been enacted in 45 states and DC since the tragedy at Sandy Hook.

## 125,000

Americans are shot each year—over one million in the past decade.

## 25x

Americans are 25 times more likely to be killed by a gun than people in other developed nations.

## WE'RE ON A MISSION TO SAVE LIVES

For 25 years, the legal experts at Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence have been fighting for a safer America by researching, drafting, and defending the laws, policies, and programs proven to save lives from gun violence. Founded in the wake of a 1993 mass shooting in San Francisco, in 2016 the Law Center joined with former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords to form a courageous new force for gun safety that stretches coast to coast.

**CONTACT US**

[media@giffords.org](mailto:media@giffords.org)

## VETERANS AND AMERICA'S GUN SUICIDE CRISIS FACTSHEET CITATIONS

1. "VA National Suicide Data Report, 2005–2016," US Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, September 2018, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/OMHSP\\_National\\_Suicide\\_Data\\_Report\\_2005-2016\\_508.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/OMHSP_National_Suicide_Data_Report_2005-2016_508.pdf). *See also*, "National Suicide Data Report Appendix," US Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp).
2. *Id.*
3. *Id.*; CDC WISQARS, "Fatal Injury Data," last accessed Oct. 15, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars>.
4. "VA National Suicide Data Report, 2005–2016," US Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, September 2018, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/OMHSP\\_National\\_Suicide\\_Data\\_Report\\_2005-2016\\_508.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/OMHSP_National_Suicide_Data_Report_2005-2016_508.pdf). *See also*, "National Suicide Data Report Appendix," US Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp).
5. *Id.* These rates have been age-adjusted. All rates are for adults.
6. Andrew Anglemeyer, Tara Horvath, and George Rutherford, "The Accessibility of Firearms and Risk for Suicide and Homicide Victimization among Household Members: a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 160, no. 2 (2014): 101–110.
7. Emily C. Cleveland, Deborah Azrael, Joseph A. Simonetti, and Matthew Miller, "Firearm Ownership among American Veterans: Findings from the 2015 National Firearm Survey," *Injury Epidemiology* 4, no. 1 (2017).
8. Miriam Reisman, "PTSD Treatment for Veterans: What's Working, What's New, and What's Next," *Pharmacy and Therapeutics* 41, no. 10 (2016).
9. Matthew Miller, Deborah Azrael, and Catherine Barber, "Suicide Mortality in the United States: The Importance of Attending to Method in Understanding Population-Level Disparities in the Burden of Suicide," *Annual Review of Public Health* 33 (2012): 393–408.
10. Eberhard A. Deisenhammer, et al., "The Duration of the Suicidal Process: How Much Time Is Left for Intervention Between Consideration and Accomplishment of a Suicide Attempt?" *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 70, no. 1 (2008): 19–24.
11. David Owens, Judith Horrocks, and Allan House, "Fatal and Non-fatal Repetition of Self-Harm: Systematic Review," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 181, no. 3 (2002): 193–199.
12. Robert N. Golden and Fred Peterson, *The Truth about Illness and Disease* (Infobase Publishing, 2009), 53.
13. Jeffrey W. Swanson, et al., "Implementation and Effectiveness of Connecticut's Risk-Based Gun Removal Law: Does it Prevent Suicides?" *Law and Contemporary Problems* 80, (2017): 179–208.
14. *Id.*