



# Risk-Based Firearm Policy Recommendations for Washington

Prepared by:  
The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence



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**The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence  
March 2015**

### ***Additional Resources:***

Center for Gun Responsibility: <http://centerforgunresponsibility.org/>

The Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy State Report:  
*Guns, Public Health, and Mental Illness: An Evidence-Based Approach for State Policy*  
<http://www.efsgv.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Final-State-Report.pdf>

The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence: <http://www.efsgv.org/>

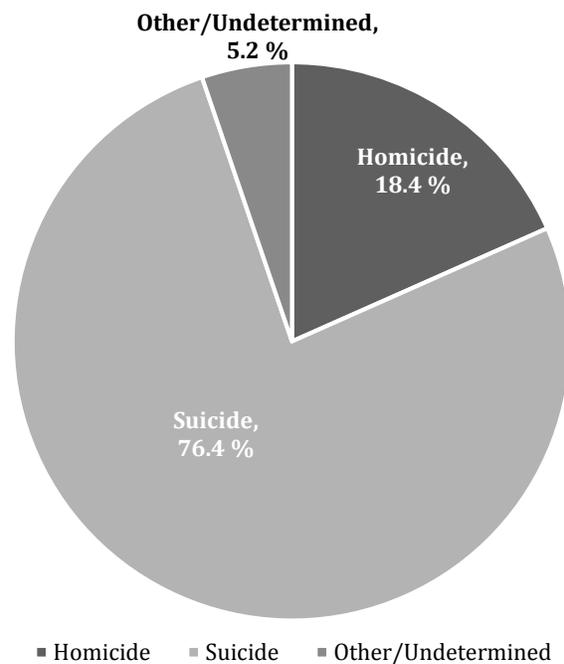
## Introduction

Firearm violence takes a tragic toll on society. Recent data shows there are more than 84,000 nonfatal firearm injuries<sup>1</sup> and 33,000 deaths<sup>2</sup>—nearly two-thirds of which are suicides<sup>3</sup>—per year in the United States. Effective solutions to reduce gun violence demand a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy. The Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy (Consortium), a group of the nation’s leading experts in public health, mental health, and gun violence prevention, came together in March 2013 to address this complex issue. These esteemed researchers, practitioners, and advocates developed evidence-based gun violence prevention policy recommendations to reduce access to firearms by people who are at an increased risk of dangerous behavior. The following analysis from the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence (Ed Fund) examines how Washington law compares to the Consortium’s recommendations and outlines steps Washington can take to prohibit individuals at increased risk of dangerous behavior from accessing firearms. The evidence supporting these recommendations is presented in the full Consortium Report: *Guns, Public Health, and Mental Illness: An Evidence-Based Approach for State Policy*.<sup>4</sup>

### I. Firearm Deaths in Washington

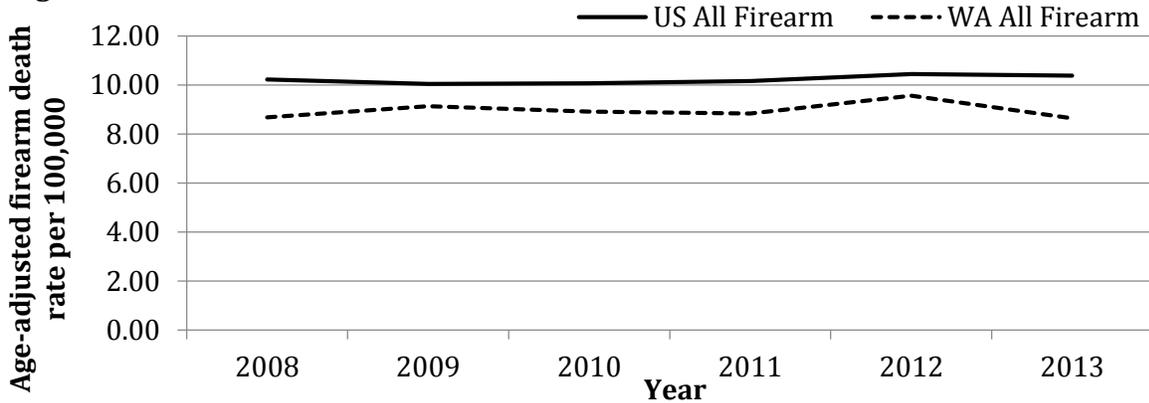
There are almost two firearm related deaths every day in Washington State (632 total deaths in 2013).<sup>5</sup> Similar to national data, the majority of gun deaths in Washington are suicides<sup>6</sup> (see Figure 1), which accounted for 76.4% of all firearm deaths in 2013.<sup>7</sup> While Washington’s overall firearm death rate (including all intents) and firearm homicide rate are lower than the national rate (see Figures 2 and 4), the state’s firearm suicide rate is higher than the national rate (see Figure 3). In 2013, the state firearm suicide rate was 6.53 deaths per 100,000 compared to 6.38 deaths per 100,000 nationally.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1. Washington Firearm Deaths, 2013



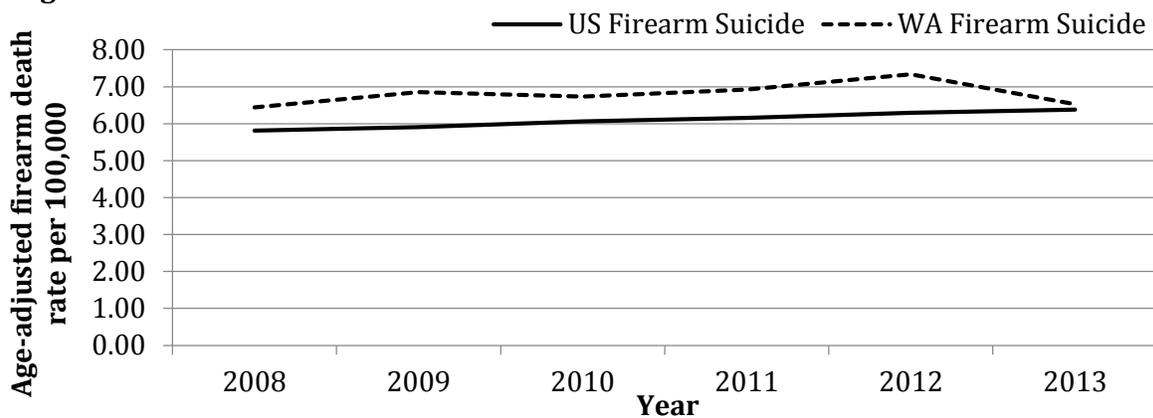
Source: CDC’s WISQARS™ (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System). Fatal Injury Reports, 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States

**Figure 2. Firearm death rates US and WA: all intents**



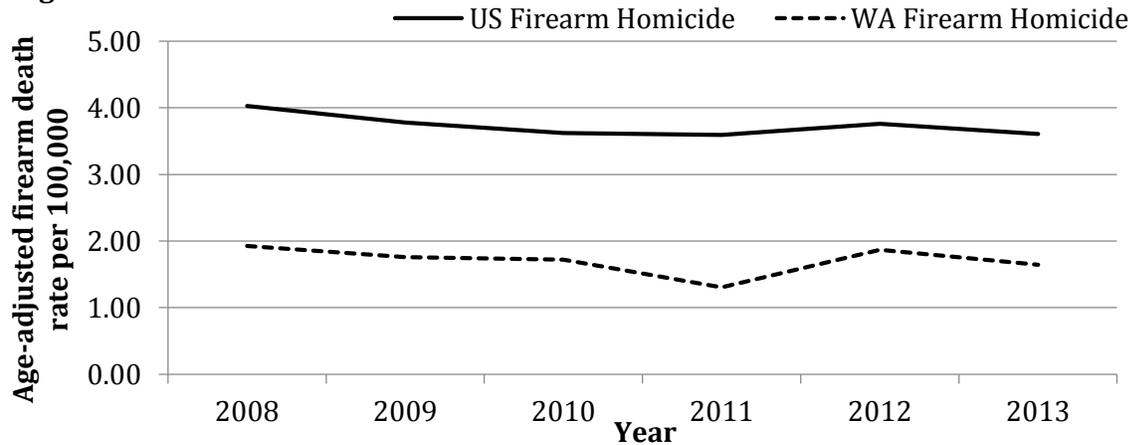
Source: CDC's WISQARS™ (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System).  
Fatal Injury Reports, 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States

**Figure 3. Firearm death rates US and WA: firearm suicide**



Source: CDC's WISQARS™ (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System).  
Fatal Injury Reports, 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States

**Figure 4. Firearm death rates US and WA: firearm homicide**



Source: CDC's WISQARS™ (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System).  
Fatal Injury Reports, 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States

## II. Consortium Recommendation Summary

The discourse after horrific mass shootings often centers on the link between gun violence and mental illness. While research shows mental illness is strongly associated with suicide,<sup>9,10</sup> the majority of mentally ill individuals will never be violent toward others.<sup>11-13</sup> There are certain times when mentally ill persons are at increased risk of interpersonal violence, such as the time period surrounding an involuntary hospitalization,<sup>14, 15</sup> but most people with common mental illnesses are not more violent than the general population without mental illness.<sup>16</sup> Mental illness alone accounts for a very small proportion of societal violence (about 4%),<sup>17</sup> therefore policies must address other risk factors for dangerousness in order to reduce overall violence in society.<sup>18, 19</sup> Aside from mental illness on its own, stronger predictors for interpersonal violence—including homicide—are a history of violence (violent misdemeanor crime convictions<sup>20</sup> and domestic violence<sup>21-23</sup>), drug abuse,<sup>24</sup> and alcohol abuse.<sup>25,26</sup> The Consortium recommends states expand current federal firearm prohibitions to include these broader risk factors for dangerousness. Policies addressing these criteria provide a comprehensive approach to gun violence prevention that is true to the evidence and does not stigmatize mental illness alone as the root cause of violence.

### 1. Mental Health Risk Factors for Dangerousness

Evidence shows that while mental illness on its own is not a strong predictor for violent behavior toward others, there are circumstances when mental illness makes an individual more prone to violence. For example, the first episode of psychosis and the time period just before and after an involuntary hospitalization.<sup>27,28</sup> Mental illness *is* strongly associated with self-harm, and common mental illnesses such as depression can increase risk of suicide.<sup>29,30</sup> Risk of suicide and access to firearms is particularly dangerous; 90% of attempted suicides by firearm are fatal.<sup>31</sup> More than three-fourths of Washington firearm deaths were by suicide in 2013 (see Figure 1) and evidence informed policies restricting access to firearms during these periods of crisis may be effective. See below for the Consortium's recommendations regarding mental health risk factors for dangerousness.

**Recommendation #1: Current state law should be strengthened to temporarily prohibit individuals from purchasing or possessing firearms after a short-term involuntary hospitalization. Concurrently, the process for restoring firearm rights should be clarified and improved.**

- 1.1 States should enact new legislation temporarily prohibiting individuals from purchasing or possessing firearms after a short-term involuntary hospitalization. This prohibition should be predicated on a clinical finding of danger to self or danger to others.

- 1.2 Restoration of an individual's ability to purchase or possess a firearm following a firearm disqualification due to mental illness should be based on an evaluation by a qualified clinician and a finding that the petitioner is unlikely to relapse and present a danger to self or others in the foreseeable future.

## **2. Other Risk Factors for Dangerousness**

As the majority of violence is related to factors other than mental illness alone, the Consortium recommends a risk-based approach to reducing violence by looking at other risk factors for dangerousness. A history of violence,<sup>32, 33</sup> including violent misdemeanor convictions<sup>34</sup> and perpetration of domestic violence,<sup>35-37</sup> is the strongest predictor of violence toward others. Individuals who abuse alcohol are at increased risk of homicide and suicide<sup>38</sup> and research also shows that firearm owners are more likely to abuse alcohol.<sup>39-42</sup> Studies also show that illegal use of controlled substances is related to an increased risk of violence.<sup>43-47</sup> The cognitive impairment associated with drug use also makes it difficult to avoid violent conflict.<sup>48-50</sup> See below for the Consortium's recommendations regarding these other risk factors for dangerousness.

### **Recommendation #2: States should enact new prohibitions on individuals' ability to purchase or possess a firearm that reflect evidence-based risk of dangerousness.**

- 2.1 Individuals convicted of a violent misdemeanor should be prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms for at least ten years.
- 2.2 Individuals who are subject to temporary domestic violence restraining orders should be prohibited from purchasing and possessing firearms for the duration of the temporary order.
- 2.3 Individuals convicted of two or more DWI or DUIs in a period of five years should be prohibited from purchasing and possessing firearms for at least five years.
- 2.4 Individuals convicted of two or more misdemeanor crimes involving controlled substances in a five-year period should be prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms for at least five years.

## **3. Periods of Crisis**

Law enforcement and concerned family members need tools to temporarily suspend firearms access during periods of crisis. Connecticut<sup>51</sup> and Indiana<sup>52</sup> have discretionary gun-removal tools for law enforcement, and California<sup>53</sup> became the first state in the country to pass a law providing family members with a similar option. See below for the Consortium's recommendations regarding these periods of crisis.

**Recommendation #3: Develop a mechanism to authorize law enforcement officers to remove firearms when they identify someone who poses an immediate threat of harm to self or others. States should also provide law enforcement with a mechanism to request a warrant authorizing gun removal when the risk of harm to self or others is credible, but not immediate. In addition, states should create a new civil restraining order process to allow family members and intimate partners to petition the court to authorize removal of firearms and temporarily prohibit firearm purchase and possession based on a credible risk of physical harm to self or others, even when domestic violence is not an issue.**

- 3.1: Authorize law enforcement to remove guns from any individual who poses an immediate threat of harm to self or others. Law enforcement officers are well versed in the “use of force” continuum, and may also use risk/lethality assessments to judge the risk of particular situations. In emergency situations, this authority can be exercised without a warrant.
- 3.2: Create a new civil restraining order process to allow private citizens to petition the court to request that guns be temporarily removed from a family member or intimate partner who poses a credible risk of harm to self or others. This process should mirror the restraining order process in most states and include a temporary *ex parte* order as well as a long-term order issued after a hearing in which the respondent had an opportunity to participate. Respondents to an order issued through this process (Gun Violence Restraining Order or GVRO) will be prohibited from purchasing and possessing guns for the duration of the order and required to relinquish all firearms in their possession for the duration of the order. Law enforcement officers should be able to request a warrant through this process to remove guns when there is a credible risk of harm that is not immediate.
- 3.3: Include due process protections for affected individuals. Specifically, provide respondents with an opportunity to participate in a hearing after having their guns removed by law enforcement (3.1) or through the GVRO process (3.2) and assure processes are in place for returning all removed guns at the conclusion of the temporary prohibition.

### **III. Opportunities for Washington**

While Washington state law exceeds federal firearm prohibitions in many ways,<sup>54</sup> Washington does not meet the Consortium’s risk-based firearm prohibitions. Washington should take the following steps to meet the Consortium’s recommendations:

#### ***Consortium Recommendation #1: Mental Health Risk Factors for Dangerousness***

- Prohibit individuals following a short-term involuntary hospitalization from purchasing or possessing a firearm for five years.

- Clarify the restoration process to specifically include evidence from a clinician that the petitioner is unlikely to be a danger to themselves or others in the foreseeable future.

**Consortium Recommendation #2: Other Risk Factors for Dangerousness**

- Prohibit individuals convicted of a violent misdemeanor from purchasing or possessing a firearm for at least ten years.
- Prohibit respondents to temporary domestic violence restraining orders from purchasing or possessing firearms for the duration of the order.
- Prohibit individuals convicted of two or more DUI or DWIs within a five year period from purchasing or possessing firearms for at least five years.
- Prohibit individuals convicted of two or more misdemeanor crimes involving controlled substances in a five-year period from purchasing or possessing firearms for at least five years.

**Consortium Recommendation #3: Periods of Crisis**

- Create a Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO) mechanism to enable law enforcement, family members, and intimate partners to petition the court to temporarily prohibit an individual in crisis from purchasing or possessing firearms.

**IV. Policy Analysis**

An analysis of current Washington law and the corresponding Consortium recommendations is provided in the table below.

<b>Consortium Recommendation #1: Mental Health Risk Factors for Dangerousness</b>	
<b>1.1: Prohibit individuals following a short-term involuntary hospitalization from purchasing or possessing a firearm.</b>	
<p><b>Current Statute</b>  <i>Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 9.41.040</i>  <i>(1)(a) A person, whether an adult or juvenile, is guilty of the crime of unlawful possession of a firearm in the first degree, if the person owns, has in his or her possession, or has in his or her control any firearm after having previously been convicted or found not guilty by reason of insanity in this state or elsewhere of any serious offense as defined in this chapter.</i></p> <p>...</p> <p><i>(iii) After having previously been involuntarily committed for mental health treatment under RCW 71.05.240, 71.05.320, 71.34.740, 71.34.750, chapter 10.77 RCW, or equivalent statutes of another jurisdiction, unless his or her right to possess a firearm has been restored as provided in RCW 9.41.047</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>71.05.240. Petition for involuntary treatment or alternative treatment--Probable cause hearing</i></p>	<p><b>Summary &amp; Recommendation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA prohibits those who have been involuntarily committed to mental health treatment.</li> <li>• Recommend adding a five-year prohibition following short-term involuntary hospitalization.</li> </ul>

<p>71.05.320. Remand for additional treatment--Less restrictive alternatives--Duration--Grounds—Hearing</p> <p>71.34.740. Commitment hearing--Requirements--Findings by court--Commitment—Release</p> <p>71.34.750. Petition for one hundred eighty-day commitment--Hearing--Requirements--Findings by court--Commitment order--Release--Successive commitments</p>	
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**1.2: Refine the restoration process to include evidence from a clinician that the petitioner is unlikely to be a danger to themselves or others in the foreseeable future.**

<p><b>Current Statute</b>  <i>Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 9.41.047</i>  <i>(3)(a) A person who is prohibited from possessing a firearm, by reason of having been involuntarily committed for mental health treatment under RCW 71.05.240, 71.05.320, 71.34.740, 71.34.750, chapter 10.77 RCW, or equivalent statutes of another jurisdiction may, upon discharge, petition the superior court to have his or her right to possess a firearm restored.</i>  <i>(b) The petition must be brought in the superior court that ordered the involuntary commitment or the superior court of the county in which the petitioner resides.</i>  <i>(c) Except as provided in (d) of this subsection, the court shall restore the petitioner's right to possess a firearm if the petitioner proves by a preponderance of the evidence that:</i>  <i>(i) The petitioner is no longer required to participate in court-ordered inpatient or outpatient treatment;</i>  <i>(ii) The petitioner has successfully managed the condition related to the commitment;</i>  <i>(iii) The petitioner no longer presents a substantial danger to himself or herself, or the public; and</i>  <i>(iv) The symptoms related to the commitment are not reasonably likely to recur.</i>  <i>(d) If a preponderance of the evidence in the record supports a finding that the person petitioning the court has engaged in violence and that it is more likely than not that the person will engage in violence after his or her right to possess a firearm is restored, the person shall bear the burden of proving by clear, cogent, and convincing evidence that he or she does not present a substantial danger to the safety of others.</i>  <i>(e) When a person's right to possess a firearm has been restored under this subsection, the court shall forward, within three judicial days after entry of the restoration order, notification that the person's right to possess a firearm has been restored to the department of licensing, the department of social and health services, and the national instant criminal background check system index, denied persons file.</i></p>	<p><b>Summary &amp; Recommendation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA’s restoration process requires the petitioner to prove they have successfully managed the condition related to the commitment; they no longer present a substantial danger to self or others; and their symptoms are not reasonably likely to recur. The process does not require a clinician provide this evidence.</li> <li>• Recommend clarifying that the restoration process require evidence come from a clinician to determine whether the petitioner is unlikely to be a danger to themselves or others in the foreseeable future.</li> </ul>
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**Consortium Recommendation #2: Other Risk Factors for Dangerousness**

**2.1: Prohibit individuals convicted of a violent misdemeanor from purchasing or possessing a firearm for at least ten years.**

**Current Statute**

*Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 9.41.040*

*(1)(a) A person, whether an adult or juvenile, is guilty of the crime of unlawful possession of a firearm in the first degree, if the person owns, has in his or her possession, or has in his or her control any firearm after having previously been convicted or found not guilty by reason of insanity in this state or elsewhere of any serious offense as defined in this chapter.*

*Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 9.41.010*

*(21) "Serious offense" means any of the following felonies or a felony attempt to commit any of the following felonies, as now existing or hereafter amended:(a) Any crime of violence;(b) Any felony violation of the uniform controlled substances act, chapter 69.50 RCW, that is classified as a class B felony or that has a maximum term of imprisonment of at least ten years;*

...

*(2)(a) A person, whether an adult or juvenile, is guilty of the crime of unlawful possession of a firearm in the second degree, if the person does not qualify under subsection (1) of this section for the crime of unlawful possession of a firearm in the first degree and the person owns, has in his or her possession, or has in his or her control any firearm:(i) After having previously been convicted or found not guilty by reason of insanity in this state or elsewhere of any felony not specifically listed as prohibiting firearm possession under subsection (1) of this section, **or any of the following crimes when committed by one family or household member against another, committed on or after July 1, 1993: Assault in the fourth degree, coercion, stalking, reckless endangerment, criminal trespass in the first degree, or violation of the provisions of a protection order or no-contact order restraining the person or excluding the person from a residence (RCW 26.50.060, 26.50.070, 26.50.130, or 10.99.040)***

**Summary & Recommendation**

- WA prohibits felons and certain domestic violence misdemeanants.
- Recommend implementing Consortium recommendation 2.1 to include a ten year prohibition for all violent misdemeanants.

<b>2.2: Prohibit individuals subject to a temporary domestic violence restraining order from purchasing or possessing a firearm for the duration of the order.</b>	
<p><b>Current Statute</b>  <i>Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 9.41.040</i>  <i>(1)(a) A person, whether an adult or juvenile, is guilty of the crime of unlawful possession of a firearm in the first degree, if the person owns, has in his or her possession, or has in his or her control any firearm after having previously been convicted or found not guilty by reason of insanity in this state or elsewhere of any serious offense as defined in this chapter.</i>  ...  <i>(ii) During any period of time that the person is subject to a court order issued under chapter 7.90, 7.92, 9A.46, 10.14, 10.99, 26.09, 26.10, 26.26, or 26.50 RCW that:</i>  <i>(A) Was issued after a hearing of which the person received actual notice, and at which the person had an opportunity to participate</i></p>	<p><b>Summary &amp; Recommendation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA only prohibits respondents to orders of protection issued after a hearing (where the individual had notice and an opportunity to participate).</li> <li>• Recommend implementing Consortium recommendation 2.2 to prohibit respondents to temporary ex parte domestic violence restraining orders for the duration of the order.</li> </ul>

<b>2.3: Prohibit individuals convicted of two or more DUI or DWIs within a five year period from purchasing or possessing firearms for at least five years.</b>	
<p><b>Current Statute</b>  <i>n/a</i></p>	<p><b>Summary &amp; Recommendation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA does not have an alcohol related firearm prohibition.</li> <li>• Recommend implementing Consortium recommendation 2.3. to prohibit individuals convicted of two or more DUI/DWI offenses within a five year period for five years.</li> </ul>

<b>2.4: Prohibit individuals convicted of two or more misdemeanor drug crimes within a five year period from purchasing or possessing firearms for at least five years.</b>	
<p><b>Current Statute</b>  <i>n/a</i></p>	<p><b>Summary &amp; Recommendation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA does not have a drug related misdemeanor firearm prohibition.</li> <li>• Recommend implementing Consortium recommendation 2.4 to prohibit individuals convicted of two or more misdemeanor drug crimes within a five year period for five years.</li> </ul>

### Consortium Recommendation #3: Periods of Crisis

#### 3.1-3.3: Create a Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO) mechanism to enable law enforcement, family members, and intimate partners to petition the court to temporarily prohibit an individual in crisis from purchasing or possessing firearms.

Current Statute	Summary & Recommendation
n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is no mechanism for law enforcement to apply for a warrant to remove firearms in Washington based on risk of dangerousness.</li><li>• There is no civil mechanism for private citizens to petition the court to remove firearms. Nor is there a mechanism for private citizens to contact law enforcement to petition the removal of guns for the broader dangerous behaviors we identify in the state report.</li><li>• Recommend implementing Consortium recommendations 3.1, 3.2., and 3.3.</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. (2013). Overall Firearm Gunshot Nonfatal Injuries and Rates per 100,000, United States. *Nonfatal Injury Reports, 2001 - 2013*. Retrieved February 27, 2015, from <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/nonfatal.html>

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. (2015). 2002 - 2013, United States Firearm Deaths and Rates per 100,000. *Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED)*. Retrieved March 4, 2015, from [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal\\_injury\\_reports.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html)

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. (2015). 2002 - 2013, United States Suicide Firearm Deaths and Rates per 100,000. *Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED)*. Retrieved January 28, 2015, from [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal\\_injury\\_reports.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html)

<sup>4</sup> Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy. (2013). *Guns, Public Health and Mental Illness: An Evidence-Based Approach for State Policy*. Retrieved from <http://www.efsgv.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Final-State-Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. (2015). 2003-2013, Washington Firearm Deaths and Rates per 100,000. *Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED)*. Retrieved March 14, 2015, from [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal\\_injury\\_reports.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html)

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. (2015). 2003-2013, Washington Suicide Firearm Deaths and Rates per 100,000. *Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED)*. Retrieved March 14, 2015, from [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal\\_injury\\_reports.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html)

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. (2015). 2003-2013, Washington Firearm Deaths and Rates per 100,000. *Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED)*. Retrieved March 14, 2015, from [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal\\_injury\\_reports.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html)

<sup>8</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. (2015). 2003-2013, Washington Suicide Firearm Deaths and Rates per 100,000. *Fatal Injury Reports 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED)*. Retrieved March 14, 2015, from [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal\\_injury\\_reports.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html)

<sup>9</sup> Brown, G. K., Beck, A. T., Steer, R. A., & Grisham, J. R. (2000). Risk factors for suicide in psychiatric outpatients: a 20-year prospective study. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology, 68*(3), 371-377.

<sup>10</sup> Malone, K. M., Haas, G. L., Sweeney, J. A., & Mann, J. J. (1995). Major depression and the risk of attempted suicide. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 34*(3), 173-185.

<sup>11</sup> Teplin, L. A., McClelland, G. M., Abram, K. M., & Weiner, D. A. (2005). Crime victimization in adults with severe mental illness: comparison with the national crime victimization survey. *Archives of general psychiatry, 62*(8), 911-921.

<sup>12</sup> Elbogen, E. B., & Johnson, S. C. (2009). The Intricate Link Between Violence and Mental Disorder Results From the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 66*(2), 152-161.

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<sup>14</sup> Choe, J., Teplin, L., & Abram, K. (2008). Perpetration of violence, violent victimization, and severe mental illness: balancing public health concerns. *Psychiatric Services, 59*(2), 153-164.

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