

## Washington's Extreme Risk Protection Order: A Vital Tool for Safety

An extreme risk protection order is a measure designed to help an individual, and the people around them, to stay safe from gun violence.

An extreme risk protection order, also called an ERPO, is a court order that temporarily restricts a person's access to guns. It is designed to help law enforcement and concerned family members intervene quickly in dangerous situations.

### FAQs

#### **How do I request an extreme risk protection order?**

To seek an extreme risk protection order, a family or household member can file an application directly with the court or contact a member of law enforcement to discuss any concerns with them. Law enforcement can then investigate any concerns and then request an extreme risk protection order from the court.

#### **Who can request an extreme risk protection order in Washington?**

Under Washington law, a law enforcement officer or a person's family or household member may file a petition for an extreme risk protection order.

A person's family or household member is defined as:

- Anyone related to the person by blood, marriage, domestic partnership, or adoption;
- Anyone who currently or formerly resided with the person;
- Anyone with a biological or legal parent-child relationship with the person, including step-parents and grandparents, or a parent's intimate partner and children; or
- Legal guardians.

#### **What happens after the request for an extreme risk protection order has been filed?**

Once the court receives a request (called a "petition") for an extreme risk protection order, the court will notify the person and schedule a court hearing about whether the order should be issued.

If, at the hearing, a court finds that a person presents a risk in the near future of suicide or of causing physical injury to another person, the judge can issue a court order that requires the person's firearms to be held by law enforcement for as long as the order is in effect.

Also, the person will not be able to purchase new firearms while the order is in effect.

### **I'm afraid to wait until a court hearing is scheduled. What if the person is in immediate danger of harming themselves or someone else?**

Concern for the safety of the public or of the person may demand that action be taken before the scheduled hearing date, to prevent immediate danger.

To protect a person or public safety during this time, a judge may issue a temporary extreme risk protection order that restricts a person's access to firearms before the person has been notified of the petition, and before a full hearing is held. The order is only issued if the judge has determined that it is necessary to prevent danger of injury in the near future.

### **How long does an emergency extreme risk protection order last?**

In Washington, an emergency order is called a temporary order and only lasts until the court hearing on a final extreme risk protection order.

Because temporary orders only stay in place for a short period of time—up to 14 days—these orders balance the urgent need for public safety with the due process rights of all involved.

### **How long does a final extreme risk protection order last?**

A final extreme risk protection order lasts for one year. Law enforcement, an intimate partner, or a family/household member may ask the court to renew the order at any time within 90 days before the original order expires. The order can only be extended after a court hearing.

### **Will an extreme risk protection order go on someone's criminal record?**

No. An extreme risk protection order is a civil court order. Its sole purpose is to remove firearms from a person who poses a danger of causing injury to themselves or to others. The court's decision to issue the order does not cause the person to have a criminal record.

### **What if I am not able to request an extreme risk protection order myself? Is there anything I can do?**

Even if you don't fall into any of the categories mentioned above, you can still take action in moments of crisis. If you are worried about someone who is showing warning signs of being at risk

of self-harm or harming someone else, you can contact a law enforcement officer and ask that they seek an extreme risk protection order.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, **text or call 988** for 24/7 connection to free, confidential support. If you have immediate safety concerns, **call 911**.