



Removing Guns to Protect Domestic Violence Survivors

By City Attorney Mara W. Elliott

There's no denying the lethal connection between guns and domestic violence. When a firearm is present in a domestic violence situation, it increases the risk of homicide by 500 percent. Armed domestic abusers not only endanger their partners, but also pose a threat to the greater community. In the United States, 60 percent of all mass shootings are either domestic violence attacks or are committed by men with histories of domestic violence.

These grim statistics led me to seek added protection for domestic violence survivors from the day they first seek refuge from their abusers. Acting quickly is important because they're in the most danger when their abuser realizes they're leaving.

In an effort to remove firearms from these situations, my Office's nationally recognized Gun Violence Response Unit now meets directly with domestic violence survivors to assess their risk and, when warranted, seek a Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO) if their abuser has a gun and poses a significant threat.

This initiative combines two passions of mine, protecting survivors and preventing gun violence, and it occurs in the safety of *Your Safe Place – A Family Justice Center*, the newly renamed Center that offers confidential, comprehensive services to anyone who has experienced domestic violence, intra-family violence, sex trafficking, sexual assault, or elder abuse.

We chose the name *Your Safe Place* because it projects the warm, welcoming, and inclusive setting in which we offer specialized services that include safety planning, counseling, assistance with emergency housing, legal and immigration advice, and access to clothing and necessities.

Now our menu of services includes access to a dedicated team of specially trained attorneys and Client Care Coordinators who work on-site with clients to assess their vulnerability to gun violence and explain the protection offered by a GVRO, which we know can be life-saving.

GVROs also fill a critical gap left by Domestic Violence Restraining Orders (DVROs). DVROs prohibit an abuser from owning and possessing guns, but there are no processes built into the DVRO to actually remove firearms. In contrast, GVROs are filed on behalf of the police, who can immediately confiscate weapons through voluntary compliance or search warrant. And while DVROs rely on evidence of a specific threat to the victim, a GVRO can consider an individual's prior victims, threats, felony arrests, or any other evidence of an increased risk for violence.

GVROs can also be filed in conjunction with a DVRO, or as an alternative to a DVRO, in situations where victims fear retaliation or challenges to serving the order. GVROs are a unique and reliable intervention tool to immediately remove guns from a volatile situation that could lead to domestic violence homicide.

We want San Diegans to know that anyone living in fear of violence is welcome at *Your Safe*

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Place, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, income, or immigration status. No questions asked. Engagement with law enforcement is always the client's choice at *Your Safe Place*, a victim-centered and trauma-informed space.

Your Safe Place offers free, confidential services to women, men, children, and teens. Our goal is to empower survivors to heal and move forward with their lives.

Ask yourself:

Are you ever afraid to go home?

Do you live in fear of your partner?

Has your partner ever threatened you, your family, or your pets?

Has your partner ever blamed you for their violent behavior?

Has your partner ever threatened you with a gun?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, or know someone who might, please contact *Your Safe Place* today.

Your Safe Place – A Family Justice Center
San Diego Housing Commission Building
1122 Broadway (2nd floor)
San Diego, CA 92101.

Hours: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. (New clients welcome before 3:30 p.m.)

Phone: 619-533-6000 (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.)

Toll-Free: 866-933-HOPE (4673)

After hours, call the 24-hour San Diego Domestic Violence hotline: 888-DV-LINKS (888-385-4657)

<https://www.sandiego.gov/yoursafeplace>

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City Attorney Mara W. Elliott
1200 Third Ave., Suite 1620
San Diego, CA 92101
Phone: 619-236-6220
Email: cityattorney@sandiego.gov
www.Sandiego.gov/cityattorney