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Gun-related Suicide Threats Spike During Pandemic

Near three-fold increase since March; Elliott urges public to seek counseling resources

San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott today said that stress from the COVID pandemic is the likely cause of a marked increase in the number of Gun Violence Restraining Orders involving threats of suicide. The nearly three-fold increase coincides with the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic and widespread stay-at-home orders.

In recognition of National Suicide Prevention Month, the City Attorney reminded the public that help is available for anyone feeling stressed or suicidal, or who knows someone who may be thinking of harming themselves. Her office released a list of resources to the media and published it on the City Attorney's website.

Access to firearms is a significant factor in suicide rates. Guns are used in more than half of suicides in the United States, and the vast majority of suicide attempts that involve guns result in death.

Since March, there has been a sharp increase in the number of Gun Violence Restraining Orders, or GVROs, involving potentially suicidal individuals. From March 1 to August 31 of this year, the City Attorney's Office filed 43 GVROs to remove firearms from individuals who threatened to harm themselves, and in some cases harm others as well. During that same period the previous year, 16 GVROs were obtained involving threats of suicide.

The City Attorney's GVRO program allows law enforcement to obtain a court order to remove firearms and ammunition from a person who poses a danger to themselves or others. Often, a loved one or the individual in crisis contacts law enforcement for help.

"Our GVRO trends illustrate the impact COVID is having on the mental health of San Diegans," San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **"We urge residents to seek help if they are in crisis and to monitor the welfare of their family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. To those grappling with their own emotional well-being during this trying time: there is no shame in asking for help."**

Recent GVROs have included individuals who feared losing their jobs and homes due to the pandemic's economic disruption and threatened suicide, including one man who gave a suicide note to his property owner saying he could not pay rent and things would end with him in a pool of his own blood. Another man who told authorities he suffered from PTSD and other mental health conditions became depressed after losing his job and risked losing his home during the lockdown phase of the pandemic, and told police he had "just enough money to buy a gun."

Studies indicate that stress brought on by fear of illness, financial pressure due to job loss, and depression resulting from isolation are all contributing factors to suicide. Mental illness and drug and alcohol abuse can also increase the risk of self-harm. Some 40 percent of adults in the U.S. say the pandemic is harming their mental health.

City Attorney Elliott urged anyone feeling stressed or suicidal, or who knows someone who is thinking of harming themselves, to contact one of the resources below:

- [National Suicide Prevention Hotline](#) is a 24-hour service with counselors available who speak English and Spanish: (800) 273-8255.
- [San Diego Access and Crisis Line](#) provides round-the-clock counseling for suicide prevention, crisis intervention, community resources, mental health referrals, and alcohol and drug support services: (888) 724-7240.
- [San Diego Veterans Administration Health System](#) has a 24-hour Veterans Crisis Line to connect callers to caring, qualified responders with VA Assistance: (800) 273-8255.

Facts for Suicide Prevention

- There were 48,344 suicides in the United States in 2018. In San Diego County alone, 429 people committed suicide last year.
- Those at a greater risk of suicide include people suffering from depression, mental illness, PTSD, chronic pain, dementia, and drug and alcohol abuse. The pandemic has contributed to stress and depression, due to illness, fear of contracting coronavirus, loss of jobs and income, and isolation, among other factors.
- Nationwide, slightly more than 50 percent of suicides are committed with firearms, and suicides attempted with guns are fatal 85 percent of the time.
- Safe storage of firearms – using a trigger lock, gun safe or lockbox – is required in the City of San Diego. Safe storage can prevent a person who is feeling suicidal from immediately accessing a loaded firearm, which is crucial since suicide is often an impulsive act. One study found that one-fourth of suicide attempts by individuals between the ages of 13 and 34 occurred within five minutes of their decision to harm themselves.

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