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## **City Attorney Elliott and Supervisor Fletcher Partner on Gun Safety Trainings for County child welfare workers will help protect families during pandemic**

**SAN DIEGO** -- San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott, San Diego County Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, San Diego County Child Welfare Services, and Service Employees International Union Local 221 today announced a partnership to protect San Diego families from gun violence. Through this collaboration, child welfare social workers will receive specialized training on critical gun safety measures, including Gun Violence Restraining Orders and San Diego's Safe Storage of Firearms law.

Child welfare social workers are on the front lines of investigating child abuse and dangerous living situations, a role with even greater importance as the COVID-19 pandemic limits children's interactions with mandated reporters such as teachers, school counselors, and doctors. Training on gun violence prevention resources and strategies will empower them to better protect families and themselves from potential harm.

The training will be made available to all 800 child welfare services staff and will count toward an annual training requirement. Conducted by the City Attorney's Office, it will cover how Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVROs) are used to remove guns from individuals who pose a threat of harm to themselves or others. Additionally, the training will explain how the Safe Storage of Firearms Ordinance, and related state laws, prevent gun access by children and other vulnerable members of the household, and how social workers can educate their clients about the law.

A national study showed a 64% surge in gun sales during the first three months of the pandemic. From March to July of this year, 110,000 Californians purchased new guns due to concerns about the pandemic. Roughly 47,000 did not already own a gun, creating many new gun-owning households where children and teens reside. A national survey of gun owners asked whether their gun storage practices had changed recently, and approximately 1.2% said they now keep a loaded gun unlocked and at the ready. About half of those reporting this change had children or teens in the home. That finding could mean that approximately 55,000 California households now have a loaded firearm accessible to unauthorized users.

**"As pandemic-related stressors mount and children attend school at homes where parents are distracted by other responsibilities, protecting families from gun violence has never been more important,"** San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **"Our goal is to prevent unthinkable tragedies and ensure the safety of the social workers who continue to investigate the well-being of San Diego's children during the pandemic. We are grateful to be working with Supervisor Fletcher and the County Child Welfare Services to keep kids safe."**

**"Our social workers do a great job of showing care and compassion for families daily, and with this new training they will be more knowledgeable about preventing gun violence in homes throughout San Diego County,"** said Supervisor Fletcher, Co-Chair of the County's Child and Family Strengthening Advisory Board. **"I appreciate City Attorney Elliott for making this training available for our workers, it is another example of the collaborative relationship we're building with the City of San Diego; and thank you to our hard working social workers for embracing this training."**

**“Our social workers help strengthen families and ensure the safety of children in San Diego,”** Dr. Kimberly Giardina, Director with Health and Human Services Agency, Child Welfare Services said. **“Providing our staff with this training will give them additional firearms education and resources to help children and families remain safe.”**

**“As social workers, we are on the frontline of supporting children and families,”** said Cecil Ashley, Protective Services Worker and member of SEIU Local 221. **“Now more than ever, my co-workers and I need more tools and support to keep ourselves and the families we serve safe.”**

**“As a US Army Military Police veteran and a gun owner I pride myself on the responsible, safe use of firearms, so I’m very pleased to join this partnership and use online technology and old fashioned outreach to make this important training available to the hard working members that we represent,”** said David Garcias, the President of SEIU 221, which represents over 10,000 County employees.

City Attorney Elliott launched San Diego’s pioneering Gun Violence Restraining Order program in 2017 and has since trained hundreds of agencies throughout California on how to use GVROs to prevent domestic violence homicide, suicide, and mass shootings. More than 600 firearms have been removed from dangerous users to date.

Often a concerned family member or even a child will contact law enforcement to report a threat that could result in gun violence. When police believe a person poses a serious risk of harm to themselves or others, the City Attorney’s Office steps in to obtain a GVRO from the court. Following a court hearing, a judge can prohibit the individual from possessing or purchasing firearms or ammunition for at least one year. Often, GVRO cases involve domestic violence, threats of suicide, mental health crises, and substance abuse. Too often, minors witness the dangerous conduct.

Three-fourths of children under age 10 know where parents store guns, and one-third have already handled them. Studies have shown that the risk of youth suicide and accidental shootings increase when firearms are not stored safely.

To prevent child gun deaths, City Attorney Elliott authored San Diego’s Safe Storage of Firearms Ordinance, which went into effect in 2019. The law requires that firearms be stored in a safe or with a trigger lock, unless the weapon is in the immediate control of the authorized user.

Data indicates that Safe Storage laws are the most effective laws at preventing suicides and unintentional injuries and deaths among children.

San Diegans for Gun Violence Prevention, a local volunteer gun safety coalition, have worked alongside the City Attorney’s Office to promote its GVRO and safe firearm storage work.

**“Education is at the heart of our mission,”** said Carol Landale, Board Member, San Diegans for Gun Violence Prevention. **“It’s encouraging whenever agencies come together to address a need and share expertise that will keep our kids safe.”**

The training will take place virtually on October 27, November 10, and December 1.

To report suspected child abuse, call: 800-344-6000.

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