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## **“Red Flag” Laws Continue to Keep San Diegans Safe** *Gun Violence Restraining Orders obtained in 200 cases in 2019*

The City Attorney’s Office worked hard in 2019 to keep San Diegans safe from gun violence.

With significant support from the San Diego Police Department, the Office obtained gun violence restraining orders (GVROs) against 200 individuals who posed a threat to themselves or others. The cases included instances where people contemplated suicide, targeted schools, threatened to shoot co-workers, and perpetrated intimate partner violence.

San Diego Police confiscated firearms, including handguns, rifles, shotguns, and assault rifles, in 62 of those cases. In all cases, the respondent was prohibited from accessing firearms or ammunition during the length of the GVRO.

**“One of my top priorities is reducing gun violence in San Diego,”** City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **“Our GVRO program has prevented countless tragedies from occurring, especially those that affect our most vulnerable populations -- children, the elderly, and victims of domestic abuse.”**

A GVRO is a powerful tool, proven to thwart violence at schools, in our neighborhoods, and in the workplace. These orders prevent fatalities in domestic violence situations as well as attempted suicides. They can also help stop individuals with Alzheimer’s and dementia from hurting themselves and others.

**“The San Diego Police Department takes all threats of violence seriously and will intervene when an individual makes a threat of violence,”** San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit said. **“GVROs are part of the intervention to keep our communities safe.”**

The City Attorney’s Office launched California’s first comprehensive GVRO program in December 2017. Due to the program’s success, the Office was selected by the state Legislature to train law enforcement agencies and municipalities throughout California. In 2019, Governor Newsom again allocated state funds to San Diego for this purpose.

Through a state training grant this Office has conducted or participated in nearly 30 formal trainings throughout the state, training more than 400 law enforcement agencies and governments, including college and unified school district police, mental health providers, and non-government organizations.

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Recent City Attorney media releases can be accessed on the San Diego City Attorney’s home page located on the Internet at <https://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney>

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Here are some statistics from the past year:

- 187 men and 13 women were served with gun violence restraining orders.
- 45 of the cases involved a potential mental illness; 71 involved domestic violence; 47 were cases where the person was believed to be suicidal; 44 cases involved threats made to strangers; 11 cases involved threats to co-workers; and 10 were threats of school shootings.
- Five of the cases involved minors (age 15-17); the oldest individual was 90; the majority were between the ages of 28-32.
- A majority of those served with gun restraining orders were Caucasian (122 of the 200).
- More than 500 firearms have been confiscated since the program began in December 2017. Of those, 249 were handguns.

Typical of the 200 cases are the following:

1. A San Diego Police sergeant witnessed a man intentionally accelerate his SUV toward pedestrians on a sidewalk in downtown San Diego. As people jumped out of the way of the vehicle, the sergeant heard the driver yell, "I'm going to kill you!" The driver fled the scene but was arrested shortly afterward by Harbor Police. The 50-year-old man was believed to be schizophrenic and under the influence of drugs. Law enforcement confiscated a shotgun, handgun, and rifle.

2. San Diego Police investigated a call reporting a subject with suicidal ideations and access to a firearm. Officers spoke to the 56-year-old man, who was visibly distraught. He told them he was suffering from crystal methamphetamine addiction and struggling to get clean. He admitted to feeling depressed and suicidal. At the officers' urging, he voluntarily gave up his handgun, and police took him to the hospital for evaluation.

3. San Diego Police responded to a call of a potential workplace threat at a tech company in Sorrento Valley. A 29-year-old employee had showed his co-workers a shotgun shell with his supervisor's name written on it.

4. A 33-year-old woman carrying a baby entered a church service in Clairemont, pulled out a handgun, and told the congregants they were going to die. She also told them she had a bomb. When church members approached her, she pointed the gun at her infant son. The congregation members tackled her and took her gun and the child from her. She is believed to have been suffering from postpartum depression.

5. A 53-year-old hospital employee made comments about shooting several of his co-workers and stated they needed to die. He was served with a gun violence restraining order; police found 11 firearms and more than 13,000 rounds of ammunition at his home.

6. A woman reported to police that she had just learned that the owner of an appliance repair company had posted multiple threats on social media saying that she "deserves to have a bullet in the head." The woman had engaged the 53-year-old man's company in January, but was dissatisfied with the service and

posted a negative review of his business on Yelp. She had never met him, but told police he'd been harassing her by phone and email ever since her Yelp post, and she feared for her safety.

7. A 31-year-old rented a room at a downtown San Diego hotel, across the street from the federal courthouse. He posted two videos online, under a fake name, showing himself handling multiple weapons and pretending to fire at unsuspecting pedestrians on the street below. One of the videos depicted what appeared to be a dry run of a mass shooting, in which he practiced reloading, and aimed his weapon at the head of a mannequin on the couch of the hotel room. An anonymous tipster reported the videos to police in November. Once authorities identified him, a gun violence restraining order was served at his home in Spring Valley, where they confiscated 14 firearms, including two assault rifles.

8. Police were called to the home of a 90-year-old man who was reported to have dementia and access to weapons. The man refused to willingly turn over his weapons, so a search warrant was obtained. Law enforcement impounded from his home a total of 23 firearms, including handguns, shotguns and rifles, and numerous rounds of ammunition.

9. A 19-year-old man was arrested after threatening to "shoot up" his school. The threat was reported to police by a Mesa College professor, who said several of her students had showed her threatening text messages from the man. Further investigation revealed he had made a separate threat to a La Jolla High School student, and had also threatened violence at Saddleback College in Orange County.

10. Police went to a home to investigate a report of a threat made on social media. Officers told the 18-year-old's father that his son had posted a picture on Snapchat holding a handgun, and implying a threat toward one his fellow students. The father said he owned a handgun, but was unaware that his son knew of the handgun's existence or whereabouts. The father agreed to let the officers take custody of the gun.

While nearly all the cases from 2019 involved adults, there were five cases involving minors, aged 15, 16, and 17. Here is one example:

A 16-year-old high school student told two female students he planned to "shoot up" the school on or by Halloween. He told one of the girls she was off his checklist because she "looks like she can fight," but warned both not to tell anyone. A few days later the girls reported the threat to school administrators, and the boy was arrested the same day. The boy's mother consented to a search of his room, where officers found seven tactical knives, seven airsoft-type handguns and rifles, pepper spray, a 30-round ammunition magazine for an AR-15 assault rifle, one live .223 bullet, 40 live 9mm bullets, handcuffs, and other law enforcement equipment.

The City Attorney's Office looks forward to continuing to work with the San Diego Police Department and our countywide partners in law enforcement to keep San Diegans safe from harm and reduce the terrible toll that gun violence has taken on our communities.

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