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Auditor General DePasquale Joins Moms Demand Action Rally, Supports Legislation to Prevent Firearms Injuries, Deaths

HARRISBURG – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today joined the Moms Demand Action rally at the state Capitol and called for legislative action to reduce firearms-related deaths and injuries.

“On average, firearms violence in Pennsylvania results in four funerals – each and every day,” DePasquale said. “Nearly two-thirds of the 1,500 Pennsylvanians who died in shootings in 2016 took their own lives, which speaks to the need for empowering family members to intervene when they fear a loved one is in danger.”

The rally was held as part of a lobby day to support a bill to authorize Extreme Risk Protection Orders. Under it, family members or law enforcement could ask a court to temporarily limit an individual’s access to firearms if that person poses a threat to themselves or others.

The issue recently received a hearing in the U.S. Senate, where Senate leaders suggested giving states incentives to enact such measures on their own.

“At least 14 other states have a so-called ‘red flag’ law on the books and some have already seen a drop in suicides,” DePasquale said. “Acting on red flags one of the ideas that my special report on firearms violence identified as a way to help save lives.”

Issued last fall, DePasquale’s special report outlined 12 recommendations to improve public safety without changing existing laws:

1. The state should work to expand access to mental health care, especially in rural communities.
2. The stigma of seeking mental health help must end; to do that, the state should mount a culturally responsive public awareness campaign.
3. Engage medical doctors and train all physicians, especially primary care physicians, to screen patients for risks of firearm violence.
4. Engage licensed firearms dealers in looking for red flags in customers who might potentially use a firearm for suicide.
5. The Pennsylvania Game Commission should expand its hunter education program section on firearm safety and create a voluntary training program on safe firearm usage and storage.
6. Encourage all firearm owners to voluntarily use safe storage best practices, such as locking unloaded firearms in a safe and storing ammunition away from firearms.
7. The state should continue to support hospital-based violence intervention programs and behavioral health resources in hospitals so they can be fully responsive to the violence they treat and ensure that unresolved trauma will not contribute to retaliation or suicide.

8. The state should support communities in organizing violence prevention efforts proven to be effective. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency's Gun Violence Reduction Initiative is a good example of that support.

9. The governor should sign an executive order requiring Pennsylvania State Police to issue quarterly and monthly reports on firearms traced from crimes to help track lost and stolen guns as well as firearm-related criminal activity.

10. The state should secure funding to increase Pennsylvania's participation in a national network that uses bullets to connect multiple crimes to single firearms.

11. Sheriffs and other law-enforcement officials who issue concealed-carry permits should thoroughly check applicants' references and backgrounds before approving applications and consider prosecuting those who provide false information.

12. Pennsylvania State Police should implement the Lethality Assessment Program, which connects victims of intimate partner violence to local domestic violence programs, statewide.

DePasquale noted that firearm-related injuries cost Pennsylvania taxpayers about \$1.5 billion in health care costs over a 10-year period because 76 percent of shooting victims were either uninsured or publicly insured.

DePasquale applauded the U.S. House of Representatives for voting to renew the Violence Against Women Act, which has been on the books for 25 years.

"The House-approved measure recognizes that a big part of preventing violence is recognizing and acting on potential threats," DePasquale said. "We need action in Harrisburg and Washington to curb violence and save lives."

He also thanked Moms Demand Action and other advocates for bringing their message to Harrisburg.

"The only way we'll develop practical solutions to this challenge is to work together," DePasquale said.

To read Auditor General DePasquale's [special report on firearm safety](#), visit www.paauditor.gov.

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