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IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CONNECTICUT'S RISK-BASED GUN REMOVAL LAW: DOES IT PREVENT SUICIDES?

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From the Desk of
Senator Brian Boquist

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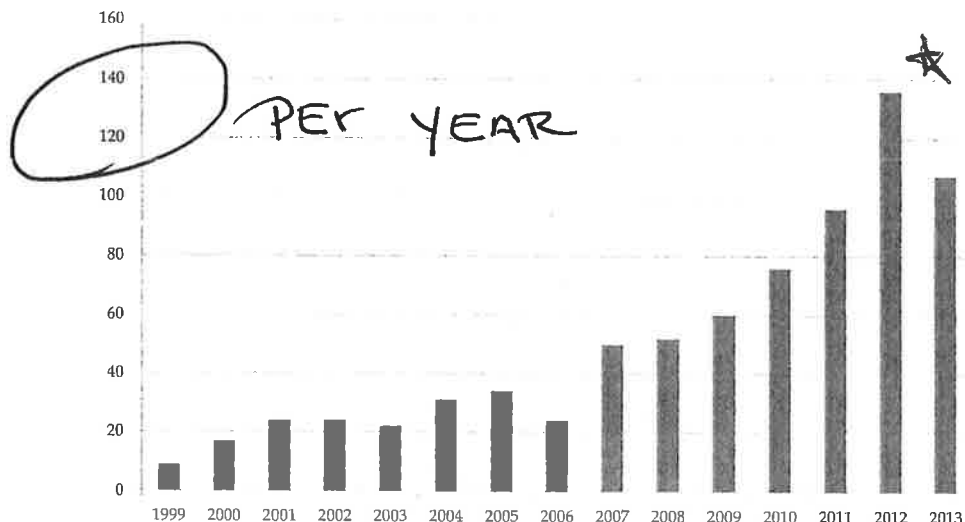
INTRODUCTION

Developing practical, effective, and legally sustainable policies to separate firearms from people at risk of harming themselves or others represents a potentially important, but challenging public health opportunity for gun violence prevention in the United States. Risk-based, time-limited, preemptive gun removal is a type of legal tool that three states—Connecticut, Indiana, and California—have adopted, and which has recently attracted considerable interest among policymakers in other jurisdictions. To date, there has been little empirical scrutiny of these laws in practice, and there are important unanswered questions about how they work: What are the legal and logistical barriers to implementing risk-based gun removal laws? Do they tend to target the right people, and are the laws fair? Do they actually help reduce gun deaths?

In 1999, following a highly publicized mass shooting,¹ Connecticut became the first state to pass a law authorizing police to temporarily remove guns from individuals

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Figure 1. Number of gun removal cases in Connecticut under C.G.S. § 29-38c, by year, 1999-2013 (Total N = 762)



IV

THE STUDY'S RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

Our study employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods, combining descriptive analysis of semi-structured key informant stakeholder interviews with statistical analysis of merged administrative records for the population of persons subjected to gun removal in Connecticut (N=762 from 1999-2013).²⁸ Wide-ranging, open-ended interviews were conducted and audio-recorded with 11 individuals who were strategically selected to provide in-depth information relevant to gun seizure policy implementation and practice. These informants included judicial and law enforcement officers and administrators, mental health professionals, advocates, and a family member of a young adult diagnosed with schizophrenia. For this paper, we quote and comment on selected passages from interviews that were particularly illustrative of legal actors' perspectives on the purpose of the gun removal law; the need to balance public safety interests with individual rights; practical and legal barriers to using the law, and how these barriers might be addressed.

State courts provided data on all gun seizures conducted under C.G.S. § 29-38c during the study period. We created a systematic database of descriptive characteristics

28. Unless otherwise cited, the source of all statistics reported in the article is the authors' original analysis of the data described in Section IV.