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Frederick County Health Department

News Release

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Frederick County Health Department Launches ERPO Liaison Program to Strengthen Gun Violence Prevention Effort

FREDERICK, MD – The Frederick County Health Department (FCHD) is excited to introduce a new Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) Liaison Program to improve the use and impact of ERPOs in Frederick and Washington Counties. This program is made possible by a two-year grant from the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy.



ERPO Kick Off Meeting January 7, 2025

ERPOs, commonly known as “red flag laws,” are a civil legal tool used to reduce the risk of gun violence by temporarily removing firearms from individuals who pose a danger to themselves or others. These orders rely on evidence-based evaluations to help prevent tragedies and protect communities. According to the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, extreme risk laws allow law enforcement, family members, and health professionals to act when someone is behaving dangerously, temporarily removing firearms to reduce the risk of harm.

“Maryland implemented the ERPO law in 2017,” said Andrea Walker, Director of the Local Behavioral Health Authority and Behavioral Health Division at FCHD. “Over the past two years, the Local Behavioral Health Authority has studied how ERPOs are used in Frederick County. This included gathering input from law enforcement, crisis providers, and academic partners. The research showed a clear need for an ERPO Liaison position and a collaborative coalition to make the law even more effective.”

Sheriff Chuck Jenkins of the Frederick County Sheriff's Office also supports the initiative. “Our office processes all ERPOs in Frederick County, and we're pleased to partner with local stakeholders through a Memorandum of Understanding to support this program,” said Jenkins. “This collaboration will strengthen education, improve safety in our community, and help reduce the number of suicides by firearm.”

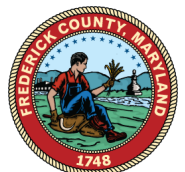
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Expanding Awareness and Training

For extreme risk laws like ERPOs to be effective, it's crucial that those who can use them understand how and when to do so. ERPOs are a vital tool for suicide prevention, and FCHD plans to distribute tailored educational materials to key groups, including:

- Physicians, mental health professionals, and social workers in hospital emergency departments, crisis stabilization centers, and hotline call centers.
- Domestic violence service providers, veterans' organizations, and other agencies supporting individuals in crisis.
- Educators and school administrators, who can guide families to use ERPOs when necessary.

The ERPO Liaison will work closely with law enforcement, legal professionals, and community organizations to expand understanding of the ERPO process. This includes developing specialized training for first responders and sharing resources with community partners to increase awareness and accessibility.

Addressing Local Challenges

Data from the Frederick County Local Behavioral Health Authority highlights the urgent need for violence and injury prevention efforts:

- Between January 2010 and August 2023, 355 suicides occurred in Frederick County, 51% involving firearms.
- Rural areas in the region experience especially high rates of firearm suicides.
- From 2018 to 2023, 42 homicides were reported in Frederick County, with firearms responsible for 52%.

"This data shows the pressing need for comprehensive violence and injury prevention strategies that prioritize health equity," said Andrea Walker. "While ERPOs are a proven tool for intervention, our goal is to go further. We will continue to build a coalition that strengthens community resilience, addresses the root causes of violence, and creates positive community experiences to break cycles of harm."

Building a Healthier Future

The ERPO Liaison Program represents a step forward in Frederick County's efforts to reduce violence and save lives. By strengthening partnerships, improving access to lifesaving tools, and promoting long-term prevention strategies, this initiative reflects the county's dedication to creating a safer, healthier community for everyone.

For more information about the ERPO Liaison Program, please contact Andrea Walker at awalker@frederickcountymd.gov.

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