Women's Center & Shelter
of Greater Pittsburgh

Violence Intervention & Prevention:
Navigating Firearm Safety and Weapons Relinquishment Orders

2026 Supporting Survivors Summit

Introductions

Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh

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Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh
https://wcspittsburgh.org/

Firearms and Intimate Partner Violence

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Why did we pursue this work?

DV relationships are 5x more dangerous with the presence of firearms

Firearms were present in 100% of the IPV homicides in Allegheny County in 2024

There are millions of DV/gun violence survivors living everyday with their injuries

Act 79 - General Overview

- Act 79 pertains to the relinquishment and return of firearms in Civil Protective Orders.
- Took effect April 10th, 2019
- All **final** PFAs adjudicated in court by a judge now require weapons relinquishment. *Final PFAs entered by agreement by consent do not require automatic weapons relinquishment.*

PCADV.org



Act 79 - General Overview

- Firearms can no longer be given to friends or family for PFA third-party safekeeping
- Firearms, ammunition, and other weapons can be relinquished to a law enforcement agency, a sheriff's office, a licensed attorney with an established relationship with the defendant, or a licensed Commercial Armory
- Firearms, ammunition, and other weapons must be relinquished within 24 hours of the issuance of a Final PFA or the service of a Temporary PFA, unless a court orders otherwise.
- A defendant may request the return of firearms upon the dismissal or expiration of the PFA but must meet certain conditions, including a background check of defendant and notification to plaintiff.

Allegheny Co. Landscape

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- Allegheny County has more than 1,200,000 residents; 25% reside within the City of Pittsburgh
- 108 police departments and 130 municipalities
- City of Pittsburgh has their own police department
  - Comprised of 6 zones and a specialized Domestic Violence Unit Detective
- Four Domestic Violence agencies that work in tandem with each of the Magisterial District Judge offices and police departments
- IPV Reform Initiative developed in 2023

Allegheny Co. Homicide Statistics

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- Between 2016 to 2021, there were 643 homicides; 86% (553) involved a firearm
- Of the IPV homicides between 2019 to 2022, 50% involved a firearm
- In 2023, 9/13 IPV murder/suicides involved a firearm
- In 2024, all 10 IPV murder/suicides involved a firearm
- In 2025, 3/4 IPV murder/suicides involved a firearm

Allegheny Co. Court Statistics (2023)

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City of Pittsburgh Police's administration of the Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) when responding to IPV 911 calls

- 72% of the 1,226 LAPs administered scored as at high danger of being killed and were immediately referred to WC&S services

Court of Common Pleas, Family Division

- 49% of the 3,246 PFA Petitions filed included a Weapons Relinquishment Supplement

Court of Common Pleas, Criminal Division

- On average, 206 new criminal cases for IPV are filed every month

Panel Discussion

Q1: How Did We Start?

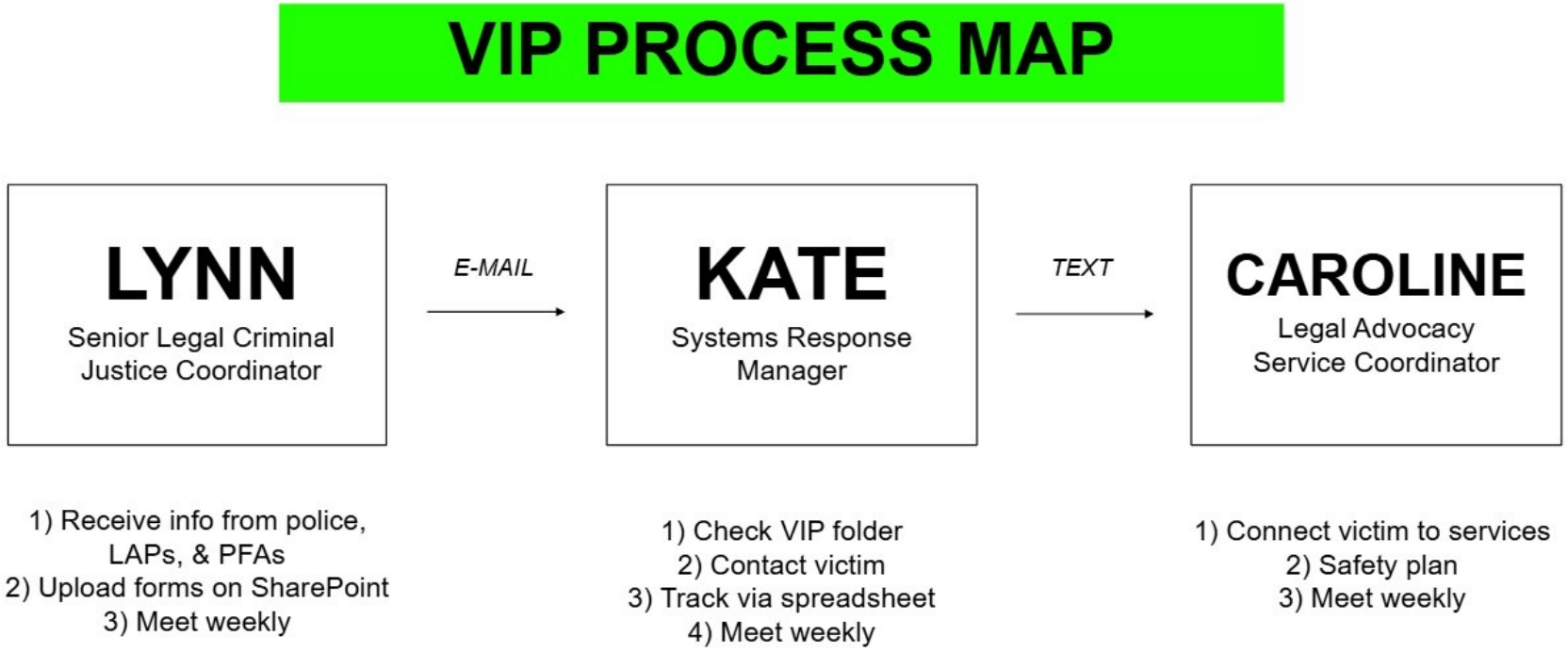
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- Pittsburgh Police and local universities committed to administering Lethality Assessment Protocols (LAP) since 2013
- PFA assistance provided by DV advocacy groups
- Allegheny County High-Risk IPV Offender Review Group's weekly meetings

Q2: What Was the Day-to-Day Work?

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At first, our plan looked like this:



Instead …

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The workflow naturally evolved to be more survivor-centered

Weekly case management meetings where all 4 advocates review each case and identify the primary need of the survivor and who should be the first point of outreach for:

- Systems support
- Direct court support
- Direct emotion support
- Immediate safety support
- Intersections

In addition to our VIP group ("Firearm Safety Team"), now all WC&S Legal Advocates discuss firearm safety during our LAP follow-up calls and PFA intake work.

Case Example

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
FAMILY DIVISION

[redacted]

Docket #: FD[redacted]

vs.

[redacted]

"ATTACHMENT A" TO TEMPORARY ORDER
FIREARMS, OTHER WEAPONS OR AMMUNITION INVENTORY

It is hereby ORDERED that Defendant relinquish the following firearms, other weapons or ammunition to the sheriff or the appropriate law enforcement agency:

Firearm / Other weapon / Ammunition	Location
Black gun with laser beam and drum on bottom (2)	Closet upstairs at [redacted]
Semi automatic (Tan and black)	[redacted]
Tan Handgun	[redacted]
Black Handgun	[redacted]
Black gun with extended handle on bottom	[redacted]

☒ All firearms, other weapons or ammunition owned or possessed by Defendant.

Police Department where Defendant resides or can be located: [redacted]

Phone Number(s) for Defendant:

BY THE COURT:

[redacted]

_____ J.

Honorable [redacted]

DATE: 2/23/26

NOTICE: This attachment will be withheld from public inspection in accordance with 23 Pa.C.S. § 6108 (a)(7)(v).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LETHALITY SCREEN

Pittsburgh Bureau of Police
1203 Western Ave
Pittsburgh PA
Phone: 412-323-7800
PittsburghPa.gov

Officer: [redacted]	Date: [redacted]	Case#: [redacted]
Victim: [redacted]	Offender: [redacted]	

☐ Check here if victim declined to be screened.

☐ Check here if the officer could not administer the screen.

Reason Screen was not administered?

A "Yes" response to any of Questions #1-3 is an automatic High-Danger assessment				
1.	Has he/she/they ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a weapon?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
2	Has he/she/they threatened to kill you or your children?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
3	Do you think he/she/they might try to kill you?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
"Yes" responses to at least four of Questions #4-11 is an automatic High-Danger Assessment				
4.	Does he/she/they have a gun or can they easily get one?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
5.	Has he/she/they ever tried to choke you?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
6.	Is he/she/they violently or constantly jealous or does he/she/they control most of your daily activities?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
7.	Have you left him/her/them or separated after living together or being married?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
8.	Is he/she/they unemployed?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
9.	Has he/she/they ever tried to kill himself/herself/themself?	☐ Yes	☑ No	☐ Not Ans
10.	Do you have a child that he/she/they knows is not his/hers/theirs?	☑ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Ans
11.	Does he/she/they follow or spy on you or leave threatening messages?	☐ Yes	☑ No	☐ Not Ans

Is there anything else that worries you about your safety? (If "yes") What worries you?
Female was worried about being assaulted again.

An officer may trigger the protocol referral, if not already triggered above, as a result of the victim's response to the below question, or whenever the officer believes the victim is in a potentially lethal situation.

Check one: ☑ Victim is High-Danger based on score
Check one: ☐ Victim is High-Danger based on officer belief
Check one: ☐ Victim is not assessed as High-Danger

If victim is High-Danger, did officer make a call to the hotline?

Did the victim speak with the hotline advocate?

Reason Victim Did Not Screen In: Did not want to

WC&S Hotline (412) 687 8005 Ext 1

VICTIMS HOME PHONE#: [redacted]

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Q3: What Did We Learn in Year 1?

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We don't know a lot about firearms!

We identified projects to help ourselves and our clients:

1. Firearm Identification guide
2. Access to PFAD
3. Access to Pittsburgh Police PFA service/weapons relinquishment tracking sheets

We've become more creative in safety planning

The value of relationship-building with our law enforcement officers

Firearms Identification Sheet

This guide is to assist in helping you accurately identify firearms that you would like to include in the weapons relinquishment form of your PFA petition. The more accurately you can identify these weapons, the higher the likelihood that police can have successful relinquishment of firearms.

The more information you can share the better!

1. List actual make and type of weapon, if known–there are examples of common firearms below.

2. Share a detailed description of where it could be (ex: if kept in car, make/model/license plate; if in house, note home address, room, and where it is usually kept within the room (ex: at 123 Main Street in defendant's room under bed).

3. Descriptors of weapon–color, size, handle material, whether there is a scope or silencer (ex: silver revolver with wooden handle and silencer).

4. Reminder: Police can not and will not relinquish "knives" from home unless they are prohibited by law, such as switch blades.

Handguns:



Revolvers *(look like handguns with a barrel that spins where bullets are loaded)*:



This document is adapted with gratitude from Washington State Courts.

Last edited 2025

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Rifles & Shotguns:

If known, include info regarding bolt-action, lever-action, or pump action.
If there is a scope you can share that as well.

Bolt-Action rifle (without scope)



Bolt-Action rifle (with scope)



Lever-action shotgun



Pump action shotguns





Semi-Automatic Rifles:

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AR-15 (very popular platform)



SKS



AK47



Full Automatic Weapons:

Machine Gun



Other Gear:

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Clip



Magazine



Bump Stock



Silencer**



**Silencers can be found on handguns as well as rifles.

Other Weapons:

Grenades
Bombs



Metal/Brass Knuckles



Blackjacks



Switchblades
Automatic knives
Gravity knives



REMINDER: only illegal knives can be recovered by police. Kitchen knives, Swiss Army/utility Knives, etc... will not be confiscated by officers.

Issues

- Unclear understanding of what happens to blank Weapons Relinquishment supplements
- Defendants have reported that their firearms are stolen or lost at time of relinquishment request
- Defendants have said they don’t have the weapons listed on Relinquishment Forms
- Plaintiffs are not being notified when weapons are being returned to defendants once their PFA expires
- When a defendant is incarcerated, weapons relinquishments aren’t a priority—but what happens once they are released and weapons are still in their possession?



Systems Improvements

- A form for all departments to use and upload into PFAD when defendants say they don't have firearms
- Search warrants for weapons when defendants are saying they don't have a weapon and plaintiffs have a detailed description of where a weapon is located
- DA's Office to share universal expectations for Weapons Relinquishments to *all* departments, including weapons return requests
- Check in with PFA clients when their final PFA is scheduled to expire/weapons may be returned



Q4: What is Our Focus in Years 2 and 3 of the Grant?

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Direct Service Goals

Systems Goals

Direct Service Goals

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- [x] PFA follow up calls—increased conversation and awareness of weapons relinquishment safety planning
- [x] LAP follow up calls
- [ ] Check-in with PFA clients when their Final PFA Order is scheduled to expire/weapons may be returned; safety planning

Systems Goals

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- [x] Weapons Guide (handout) to decrease blank Weapons Relinquishment Supplements as a result
- [ ] Weapons Relinquishment information sheet—Act 79 information for plaintiffs to understand weapons relinquishment options for their PFA cases
- [x] Connections to US Attorney's Office re: ICCs with firearms
- [ ] Trainings with Advocates and attorneys for Act 79
- [ ] Assistance from our Local DA's Office to create a standard response for weapons relinquishment and firearm release requests once PFAs expire
- [x] Connections to Sheriff's office
- [ ] Designated process for when defendants are served with a PFA in jail and weapons are requested to be relinquished.
- [ ] Consistent PFAD entry
- [ ] A clear form in PFAD to attest when defendants say they do not have a firearm
- [ ] Search warrants information when plaintiffs detail a clear location of weapons and defendants deny there is a weapon present
- [ ] Connections to community violence intervention groups

VIP Grant Y1 Stats:
April 2025 through March 2026

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VIP Grant PFA stats/weapons/LAPs 2025-2026, Y1				
Month	Total number of temporary PFA requests	Total Weapons Relinquishment Requests	Weapons Relinquishments reviewed by VIP group	LAPs reviewed, questions 1 and/or 4
April	424	109	20	data not collected
May	421	148	20	63
June	405	149	26	39
July	474	153	18	59
August	408	141	26	50
September	433	138	19	87
October	419	131	16	26
November	326	111	18	42
December	341	74	19	11
January	336	123	26	34
February	335	109	15	28
March	355	115	26	56
Total:	**4677**	**1501**	**249**	**495**

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