

**RCW 7.105.900 Findings—2021 c 215.** (1) Washington state has been a national leader in adopting legal protections to prevent and respond to abuse, violence, harassment, stalking, neglect, or other threatening behavior, through the enactment of different types of civil protection orders, which are intended to provide a fast, efficient means to obtain protection against perpetrators of these harms.

(2) Washington state has enacted six different types of civil protection orders: (a) Domestic violence protection orders, adopted by the legislature in 1984; (b) vulnerable adult protection orders, adopted by the legislature in 1986; (c) antiharassment protection orders, adopted by the legislature in 1987; (d) sexual assault protection orders, adopted by the legislature in 2006; (e) stalking protection orders, adopted by the legislature in 2013; and (f) extreme risk protection orders, enacted by a vote of the people through Initiative Measure No. 1491 in 2016.

(3) These civil protection orders are essential tools designed to address significant harms impacting individuals as well as communities. The legislature finds that:

(a) Domestic violence is a problem of immense proportions. About 15 percent of Washington adults report experiencing domestic violence in their lifetime, and women, low-income people, and black and indigenous communities experience higher rates of domestic violence. When domestic violence victims seek to separate from their abuser, they face increased risks. Forty-five percent of domestic violence homicides occur within 90 days of a recent separation, while 75 percent occur within the first six months of separation. Domestic violence victims also face increased risks when their abuser has access to firearms. Firearms are used to commit more than half of all intimate partner homicides in the United States. When an abusive partner has access to a gun, a domestic violence victim is 11 times more likely to be killed. Domestic violence has long been recognized as being at the core of other major social problems: Child abuse, other crimes of violence against persons or property, homelessness, and alcohol and drug abuse. Research has identified that adverse childhood experiences such as exposure to domestic violence have long-term negative impacts on health, well-being, and life outcomes, including criminal legal system involvement. Washington state studies have found that domestic violence is the most predictive of future violent crime by the perpetrator. Nationwide, domestic violence costs over \$460,000,000,000 each year for health care, absence from work, services to children, and more. Adolescent dating violence is occurring at increasingly high rates, and preventing and confronting adolescent violence is important in preventing future violence in adult relationships. Domestic violence should not be minimized or dismissed based on any mental health diagnoses of the perpetrator or the victim. To the contrary, the presence of mental health concerns or substance use of either party increases the likelihood of serious injury and lethality. The legislature finds that it is in the public interest to improve the lives of persons being victimized by the acts and dynamics of domestic violence, to require reasonable, coordinated measures to prevent domestic violence from occurring, and to respond effectively to secure the safety of survivors of domestic violence;

(b) Sexual assault is the most heinous crime against another person short of murder. Sexual assault inflicts humiliation, degradation, and terror on victims. The perpetrator's age, gender, or

relationship does not define the seriousness. According to the centers for disease control and prevention, one in six men, one in three women, and one in two nonbinary persons will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. Because of the stigma of a sexual assault and trauma, many victims are afraid or are not ready to report to law enforcement and go through the rigors of the criminal justice process. Individuals with disabilities; black and indigenous communities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other individuals experience a higher rate of sexual violence. Experiencing a sexual assault is itself a reasonable basis for ongoing fear. Rape is recognized as the most underreported crime; estimates suggest that only one in seven rapes is reported to authorities. Victims who do not report the crime still may need to seek safety and protection from future interactions with the perpetrator and have a right to such safety and protection. Some cases where rape is reported are not prosecuted or do not lead to a conviction. A victim should be able to expediently seek a civil remedy requiring that the perpetrator stay away from the victim, independent of the criminal process and regardless of whether related criminal charges are pending;

(c) Stalking is a crime that affects 3,400,000 people over the age of 18 each year in the United States. Almost half of victims experience at least one unwanted contact per week. 29 percent of stalking victims fear that the stalking will never stop. The prevalence of anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression is much higher among stalking victims than among the general population. Research shows that stalking is a significant indication of future lethality. Increased access to technology has also increased methods of stalking. Stalking is distinct from common acts of harassment or nuisance covered by antiharassment orders, and law enforcement agencies need to be able to rely on orders that distinguish stalking from acts of harassment or nuisance. Victims who do not report the stalking behavior they are experiencing still may need safety and protection from future interactions with the perpetrator through expedient access to the civil court system, and this protection can be accomplished without infringing on constitutionally protected speech or activity;

(d) Serious, personal harassment through invasions of a person's privacy by an act, acts, or words showing an intent to coerce, intimidate, or humiliate the victim is increasing. The legislature finds the prevention of such harassment is an important governmental objective, and that victims should have access to a method to prevent further contact between the victim and perpetrator. A person may be targeted for harassing behavior due to his or her identity, such as age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability, or immigration status. The legislature finds that unlawful harassment directed at a child by a child is not acceptable and can have serious consequences, but that some negative interactions between young people, especially in schools, do not rise to the level of unlawful harassment. It is the intent of the legislature that a protection order sought by the parent or guardian of a child as provided for in this chapter be available only when the alleged behavior of the person under the age of 18 to be restrained rises to the level set forth in this chapter;

(e) Some adults are vulnerable and may be subject to abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, or abandonment by a family member, care provider, or other person who has a relationship with the vulnerable adult. A vulnerable adult may have physical disabilities,

mobility issues, or be otherwise unable to represent himself or herself in court or to retain legal counsel in order to obtain the relief available under this chapter or other protections offered through the courts. A vulnerable adult may lack the ability to perform or obtain those services necessary to maintain his or her well-being because he or she lacks the capacity for consent, and may have health problems that place him or her in a dependent position. The legislature finds the legal tool of protection orders will help prevent abuse, neglect, exploitation, or abandonment of vulnerable adults; and

(f) Every year, over 100,000 persons in our country are victims of gunshot wounds and 38,000 individuals lose their lives from gun violence. On average, there are over 100 gun deaths each day, 61 percent of which are suicides. In Washington state, the suicide rate is on average 10 percent higher. Extreme risk protection orders allow for the temporary removal of the most lethal means of suicide from the situation, saving lives of those at risk. Studies show that individuals who engage in certain dangerous behaviors are significantly more likely to commit violence toward themselves or others in the near future. These behaviors, which can include other acts or threats of violence, self-harm, or the abuse of drugs or alcohol, are warning signs that the person may soon commit an act of violence. Individuals who pose a danger to themselves or others often exhibit signs that alert family, household members, or law enforcement to the threat. Restricting firearms access in these moments of crisis is an important way to prevent gun violence and save lives. Many mass shooters displayed warning signs prior to their killings, but federal and state laws provided no clear legal process to suspend the shooters' access to guns, even temporarily. In enacting the extreme risk protection order, the people intended to reduce gun deaths and injuries, while respecting constitutional rights, by providing a procedure for family, household members, and law enforcement to obtain a court order temporarily preventing individuals who are at high risk of harming themselves or others from accessing firearms when there is demonstrated evidence that the individuals pose a significant danger, including danger as a result of threatening or violent behavior. Additionally, extreme risk protection orders may provide protections from firearm risks for individuals who are not eligible to petition for other types of protection orders. Extreme risk protection orders are intended to be limited to situations in which individuals pose a significant danger of harming themselves or others by possessing a firearm, having immediate access to a firearm, or having expressed intent to obtain a firearm, and include standards and safeguards to protect the rights of respondents and due process of law. Temporarily removing firearms under these circumstances is an important tool to prevent suicide, homicide, and community violence.

(4) The legislature finds that all of these civil protection orders are essential tools that can increase safety for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, abuse of vulnerable adults, unlawful harassment, and threats of gun violence to obtain immediate protection for themselves apart from the criminal legal system. Victims are in the best position to know what their safety needs are and should be able to seek these crucial protections without having to rely on the criminal legal system process. The legislature further finds the surrender of firearms in civil protection orders is critical to public health. In keeping with the harm reduction approach of this lifesaving tool, the legislature finds that it is appropriate

to allow for immunity from prosecution for certain offenses when appropriate to create a safe harbor from prosecution for certain offenses to increase compliance with orders to surrender and prohibit firearms.

(5) To better achieve these important public purposes, the legislature further finds the need to clarify and simplify these civil protection order statutes to make them more understandable and accessible to victims seeking relief and to respondents who are subject to the court process. An efficient and effective civil process can provide necessary relief many victims require in order to escape and prevent harm. Clarification and simplification of the statutes will aid petitioners, respondents, law enforcement, and judicial officers in their application, help to eliminate procedural inconsistencies, modernize practices, provide better access to justice for those most marginalized, increase compliance, and improve identified problem areas within the statutes. Those who participate in the protection order process often find it difficult to navigate the statutes, which were adopted at different times and contain differing jurisdictional approaches, procedures, definitions, and types of relief offered, among other differences, all of which can create barriers and cause confusion. Harmonizing and standardizing provisions where there is not a need for a specific, different approach can provide more uniformity among the laws and significantly reduce these obstacles.

The legislature finds that these improvements are needed to help ensure that protection orders and corresponding court processes are more easily accessible to all litigants, particularly parties who may experience higher barriers to accessing justice.

(6) The legislature finds that advances in technology have made it increasingly possible to file petitions, effect service of process, and conduct hearings in protection order proceedings through more efficient and accessible means, while upholding constitutional due process requirements. These include using approaches such as online filing of petitions, electronic service of protection orders, and video and telephonic hearings to maintain and improve access to the courts. These alternatives can help make protection order processes more accessible, effective, timely, and procedurally just, particularly in situations where there are emergent risks. The legislature finds that it would be helpful for petitioners, respondents, judicial officers, court personnel, law enforcement, advocates, counsel, and others to have these new tools enacted into statute and made readily available in every court, with statewide best practices created for their use, specific to the context of civil protection orders. The legislature further finds that it is important to modernize other aspects of the civil protection order statutes to reflect current trends, and to provide for data collection and research in these areas of the law.

(7) The legislature further finds that in order to improve the efficacy of, accessibility to, and understanding of, civil protection orders, the six different civil protection orders in Washington state should be included in a single chapter of the Revised Code of Washington. [2021 c 215 s 1.]

**Effective date—2022 c 268; 2021 c 215:** "(1) Except for sections 12, 16, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25, 34, and 36 of this act, this act takes effect July 1, 2022.

(2) Sections 19, 21, 24, and 34, chapter 215, Laws of 2021 take effect March 31, 2022." [2022 c 268 s 47; 2021 c 215 s 87.]