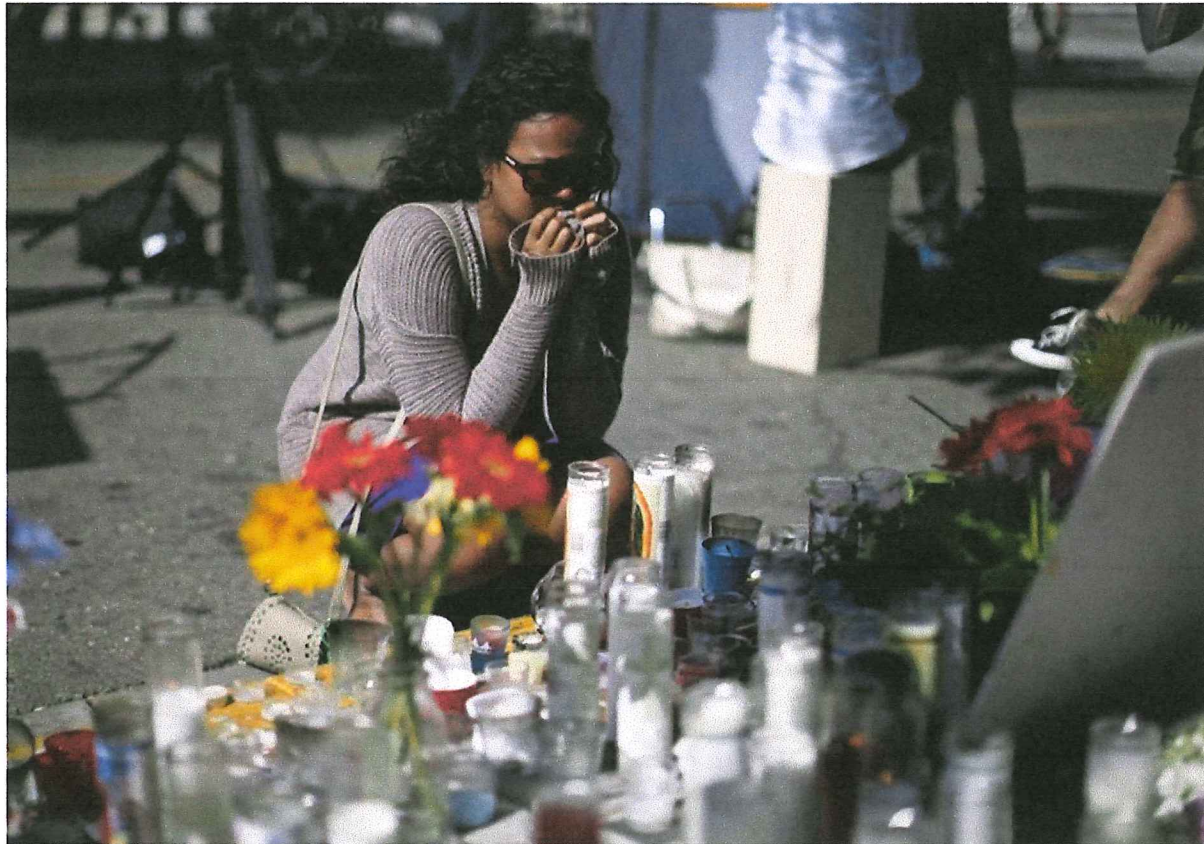


EDITORIAL

# Mass. should pass gun restraining order bill



LUCY NICHOLSON/REUTERS/FILE

**Susana Abdurahman cried in front of a makeshift memorial for a slain University of California, Santa Barbara, student in the wake of a 2014 shooting.**

July 26, 2017

In the spring of 2014, Elliot Rodger murdered his two roommates and one of their friends in his apartment, near Santa Barbara, Calif., changed out of his blood-stained clothes, bought a triple-vanilla latte at Starbucks, and went on a shooting spree that killed three more and wounded 14.

After exchanging gunfire with police, he shot himself in the head.

Of all the tragedies that converged that day, there was none, perhaps, as maddening as this: Rodger's mother and a mental health worker had raised concerns with police in the run-up to the rampage, but because he had broken no law, there was little that law enforcement could do to intervene.

Afterward, the California legislature moved to fix that deadly shortcoming in the law — passing a measure that allows family members to seek court orders seizing guns from potentially violent people before they hurt somebody. Similar laws in Washington, Connecticut, and Indiana have doubtless saved lives. Now, Massachusetts lawmakers have an opportunity to adopt similar protections.

Representative David P. Linsky, a Natick Democrat, has filed legislation that would allow family and household members, police, district attorneys, and health care providers to go to court and seek “extreme risk protective orders” for individuals who pose a significant danger to themselves or others. The bill, which has raised the hackles of gun rights groups, stands up to constitutional scrutiny and builds in an important hearing mechanism before long-term restrictions can be imposed. The Legislature should pass it.

Judges would be able to impose an immediate 10-day bar on possession or purchase of guns and extend the order to a year after a full hearing.

When the Supreme Court established an individual right to bear arms, in its landmark Heller ruling in 2008, it also carved out unambiguous exceptions. “Nothing in our opinion,” the court wrote, “should be taken to cast doubt on long-standing prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill.”

*Guns have exacted an enormous toll in Massachusetts. Between 2000 and 2015, almost 3,500 people died by firearms in this state — in crimes ranging from domestic disputes that spun out of control to street fights fueled by unstable personalities.*

The Commonwealth has not been immune from mass shootings. Linsky, a former Middlesex prosecutor, recalls the so-called “Wakefield massacre,” when software tester Michael “Mucko” McDermott slaughtered seven co-workers, on a Tuesday morning in 2000.

Linsky’s bill would also afford protection for someone threatening suicide. Taking guns from the despondent won’t save every life, of course, but could help ease a growing public health problem: More than half of those who die by firearm, Linsky points out, kill themselves.

Guns are a ruthlessly efficient means to death — for the despondent woman intent on ending her own life, and for the angry young man determined to take others with him. Those closest to would-be shooters — and most likely to be in danger — deserve the legal tools that might add an essential layer of protection