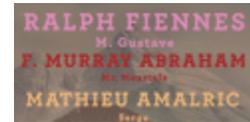


The New York Times



December 28, 2013

When the Mentally Ill Own Guns

By **THE EDITORIAL BOARD**

Lawmakers who refuse to support effective gun safety measures often prefer to talk about better screening of the mentally ill to identify deranged would-be perpetrators before they can carry out mass shootings. This is, of course, a political dodge. Even in the handful of states where law enforcement agencies are trying to confiscate the guns of unstable individuals, state and federal laws too often enable the mentally ill to reclaim their guns as a right under the Second Amendment.

This lethal thicket was starkly mapped by The Times in a [recent report](#) showing how people who brandish guns, threaten family and neighbors and even admit to mental illness are able to get around the police. This is due in part to rigid legal requirements for a documented history of involuntary hospital commitment or other court actions that go well beyond the threatening incidents that are reported to law enforcement.

In Connecticut, which has gun confiscation laws that were tightened after the Newtown school massacre, an angry man who was off his medications for paranoid schizophrenia threatened to shoot his mother and the police if they confiscated his weapons. The police managed to seize his 18 rifles and shotguns and seven high-capacity magazines. But the man expects to reclaim his arsenal in April, asserting he is back on his medications and has had no further police incidents (although he told Michael Luo and Mike McIntire of The Times that he has experienced paranormal activities).

Similar cases from other states and cities show that seriously troubled individuals are able to reclaim their weapons, despite serious concerns about the threat to public safety. “There is no common-sense middle ground to protect the public,” a law enforcement adviser in Ohio warned.

Most mentally ill persons are not violent, though The Times’s analysis of 180 confiscation cases in Connecticut (dealing with people posing an imminent risk of injury to themselves or others) found that close to 40 percent of those cases involved people with serious mental illness. The common denominator in gun violence, however, is not deranged individuals; it is the easy access to assault rifles and other high-powered weapons afforded all Americans. A

few determined states are attempting to deal with this issue, but real solutions must involve federal legislation and national standards, which are nowhere in sight.

[Meet The New York Times's Editorial Board »](#)