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## Keep NRA's gun politics out of legislation that would protect victims of sexual assault

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Gabriel Campanario / The Seattle Times

**In January, the Legislature will once again be asked to pass a common-sense bill to treat sexual-assault victims the same as victims of other crimes. Two advocates of the bill hope gun politics will not get in the way.**

By [Mary Ellen Stone](#) and [Dan Satterberg](#)

*Special to The Times*

IN addition to all the other issues Washington state legislators will face next year, they will also have to answer this question: Why should victims of sexual assault receive less protection than victims of domestic violence, stalking or harassment?

Under the law today, a judge can issue a domestic violence, stalking or harassment protection order that protects victims for as long as the judge

deems necessary, based on the unique facts in each case. That order sometimes involves a suspension of firearms rights. However, through a quirk in the law, Sexual Assault Protection Orders can only last up to two years before they must be renewed. For the third consecutive year, we will ask the Legislature to pass a bill to make all such protection orders equal.

A Sexual Assault Protection Order (SAPO) provides an important civil protection for victims of sexual assault. They are particularly helpful when criminal charges are not, or have not yet, been filed. The order requires the perpetrator to stay away from the victim and places the victim frequents, and to have no further direct or indirect contact with the victim.

A significant problem with the current order is that it must be reissued every two years. All other protection orders for victims in Washington, including domestic violence, anti-harassment and stalking, allow for judicial discretion in the length of time a protection order is in place. SAPOs, however, are unique and there is a two-year cap on the orders. This requires victims of sexual assault to return to court every two years if they need continued protection, placing an unnecessary burden on victims and discouraging them from using a law that is designed to offer protection.

Earlier this year, a bill to fix this problem passed the state Senate unanimously, but died in the House during the last week of the legislative session because the National Rifle Association suddenly expressed opposition to the bill.

We remain perplexed by the NRA's concerns for the following reasons:

- The current law regarding firearms rights and protection orders is the result of a bill passed in 2014 that the NRA helped negotiate and did not



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object to. Again, this bill makes no changes to that law; it simply treats the duration of SAPOs the same as other protective orders.

- There is no automatic requirement to surrender firearms when a SAPO is granted. A separate hearing is held to determine whether the respondent displayed a weapon or used a weapon to threaten the victim or whether there is some other reason that the respondent cannot possess a firearm. This bill makes no change at all to current law regarding weapons forfeiture under protection orders.
- No one loses their firearms rights “permanently” under any protection order. A judge can revoke those rights for an indeterminate amount of time, but the respondent always has the right to petition to have them restored. This bill would not change that.
- In approximately 80 percent of cases filed in King County Superior Court where SAPOs were granted since the 2014 bill passed, firearms rights were not suspended.

In January, we will once again ask the Legislature to pass a common-sense bill to simply treat sexual-assault victims the same as victims of other crimes. We hope gun politics will not get in the way.

Please contact your legislators and urge them to support this legislation. You can find contact information here: [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov).

The issue before the House and Senate next year is very simple: Why do we have less compassion and respect for the victims of sexual assault than we have for other victims?

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