

Submitted by Susan Lender, a concerned citizen.

An issue that arises when legislatures look for ways to prevent mass violence is that of “red flag laws”. These laws often ask members of the general public to report what they see as a potential mass violence incident in the making. Let me cite an example from an article by Charles C.W. Cooke (January 12, 2020). This is how “red flag” laws can go wrong.

“ A ‘Red-Flag Law’ Horror Story”

In September 2019, Stephen Nichols, an 84-year-old Korean War veteran and retired police officer was summarily fired from his job as a school crossing guard in Tisbury, Massachusetts. Worse still, Nichols guns and firearms license (which he had held since before 1958) were seized from him under Massachusetts’ broad “red-flag” law.

Nichols crime? He was overheard worrying in a diner that the local school’s resource officer was routinely abandoning his post to go buy coffee, and that this might lead someone to take advantage and :shoot up the school.”

Without a trial, without being arrested and charged with a crime, Nichols was “punished” for what a waitress in a diner overheard. His job has been restored, thanks to pushback from the community. The police have still not returned his firearms license or his guns.

This is how “red flag” laws can represent a horrible miscarriage of justice. They have no place in preventing mass violence.