

MY TURN

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## New Arizona law part of gun-violence solution



Another senseless killing spree by an individual with apparent serious mental-health is-

ssues leaves us once again with too many "what if" questions on how this tragedy could have been prevented. The echoes of a similar incident that resulted in the tragic deaths of six people and the injury of 14 others, including former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, near Tucson on Jan. 8, 2011, still reverberate throughout Arizona.

After the April 2007 shooting tragedy at Virginia Tech, it was revealed that very few mental-health records had been made available to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) — the centralized, computerized system providing information to federal firearms licensees on whether a prospective purchaser is eligible to receive or possess firearms. The Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) reviewed reporting by Arizona law-enforcement agencies, courts and the Department of Public Safety and determined that Arizona's reporting of mental-health records was similarly deficient.

In response, ACJC worked with Arizona policy makers to improve how mental-health rulings and criminal-record information are reported to NICS. Accordingly, this past legislative session Rep. Justin Pierce, the chairman of the House Committee on Public Safety, Military and Regulatory Affairs, sponsored House Bill 2322, the NICS Improvement Act. With the help of important stakeholders, including Arizona law enforcement,



Elliot Rodger displayed serious mental issues before a May killing rampage in Isla Vista, Calif., that left seven dead.

the National Rifle Association, the Citizens Defense League and the Arizona State Rifle and Pistol Association, the bill was ultimately passed unanimously by both the House and Senate and signed into law by Gov. Jan Brewer.

While no law can fully prevent future tragedies, HB 2322 is an important first step to enhancing public safety by increasing the reporting of mental-health rulings to NICS.

Specifically, HB 2322 will help keep weapons out of the hands of individuals found by the courts to have serious mental-health issues by automatically transmitting court rulings to the NICS system, improving the reliability and dependability of the system for a variety of uses — including the performance of background checks for firearm purchases by law-abiding citizens.

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Our work here is not done. We believe that law-enforcement officers on the street should receive a notification indicator of these court rulings, and we strongly encourage members of the 52nd Arizona Legislature and all concerned stakeholders to give serious consideration to providing this limited notification to law enforcement.

Ensuring that our law-enforcement officers have the most complete information possible when dealing with individuals with serious mentalhealth issues as determined by a court is the next essential step that Arizona should take in helping protect the public from future tragedy.

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