

# Welcome!

## Please note:

- This webinar is being recorded and will be posted on PCCD's website and YouTube channel once it becomes available.
- Please check your audio settings to make sure you can hear today's presentation using your computer or other device.
- You cannot unmute and we cannot hear you, you cannot access the chat feature.
- If you have any questions regarding today's presentation, please email Lindsay Vaughan at [c-lvaughan@pa.gov](mailto:c-lvaughan@pa.gov)





Pennsylvania  
**Commission on Crime  
and Delinquency**

APRIL 8, 2025

# **Overview of Act 79 Research Findings:**

## Protection from Abuse Orders and Weapons Relinquishment

# What we'll cover today:

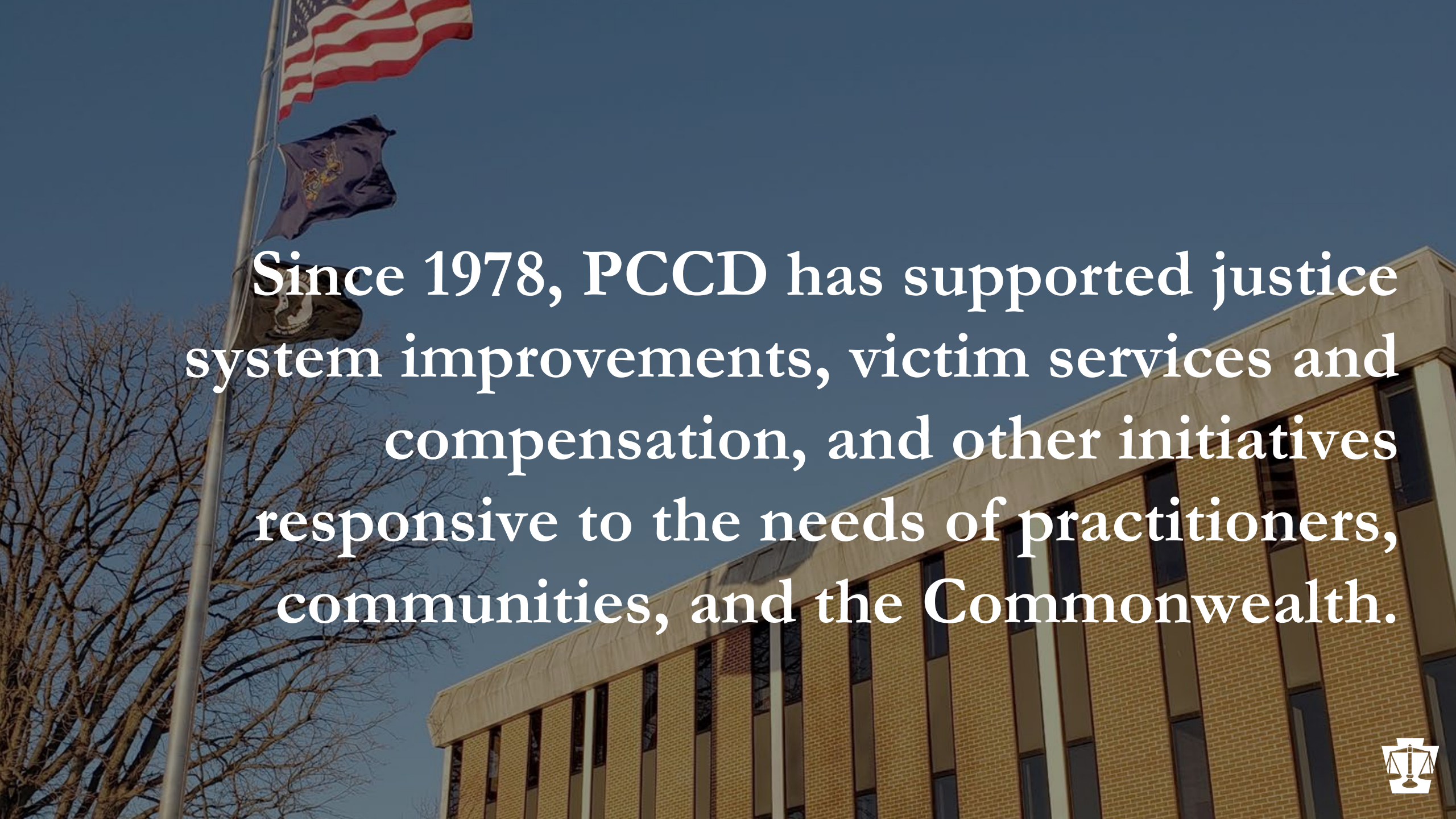
1. Overview of PCCD, PCADV and Temple research team and introduction of presenters
2. Background – PFAs, Act 79 and PFAD
3. Summary of Research and Findings
4. Key Practitioner Take-aways
5. Next Steps





## *PCCD Overview*

A brief introduction to PCCD's  
mission, history, and work.

The background of the image shows a multi-story brick building with a series of vertical windows. To the left, a flagpole holds three flags: the United States flag at the top, a blue flag with a crest in the middle, and a dark flag with a white emblem at the bottom. Bare tree branches are visible on the left side of the frame. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

Since 1978, PCCD has supported justice system improvements, victim services and compensation, and other initiatives responsive to the needs of practitioners, communities, and the Commonwealth.





## REVIEW OF FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT

# PCCD invests in a wide range of programs aligned with our mission and strategic priorities.



Preventing & Reducing  
Gun Violence



Victim Services &  
Compensation



School Safety &  
Mental Health



Criminal Justice  
System Improvements



Youth-focused  
Prevention



Law Enforcement  
Technology & Training



Behavioral/Mental  
Health Initiatives



Children's Advocacy  
Centers



Juvenile Justice System  
Improvements



Data &  
Research

# PCCD's Internal Research Team

Four IUP faculty serve as research consultants to PCCD full-time

Three additional IUP faculty serve PCCD on a part-time basis

**Dr. Brandon Vick** – Department of Economics

**Lindsay Vaughan, J.D.** – Department of School Psychology,  
Special Education, and Sociology



## The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

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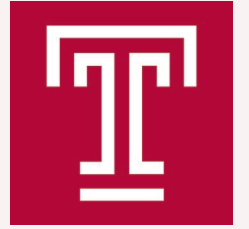
- The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) is a statewide collaborative membership organization committed to ending intimate partner violence.
- Founded in 1976, PCADV 's network of 60 local domestic violence programs serve survivors of domestic violence and their children in all 67 counties of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- With you today – **Danni L. Beinschroth, Esq.**



[www.pcadv.org](http://www.pcadv.org)



# Temple University – Qualitative Research Initiative



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Expert

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Co-Investigator and Qualitative Methods Expert

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Project Manager

Two student workers

# Background: Protection from Abuse Orders and Act 79 of 2018

## A QUICK REVIEW

# Protection from Abuse Order (PFA)

- Provides civil protection for victims of domestic violence against a family or household member.
  - Victim (Plaintiff) seeks to be protected from a “family or household member” (Defendant)
- PFAs are “Quasi-criminal” in nature
- Victim can seek specific types of relief:
  - No Abuse
  - No Contact
  - Eviction or exclusion from residence
  - Temporary child custody
  - Temporary child support
  - Relinquishment of Firearms\*\*



## A QUICK REVIEW

# Protection from Abuse Order (PFA)

<b>PETITION FOR PROTECTION FROM ABUSE</b>	IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF _____ COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA NO. _____
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**1. PLAINTIFF**

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First Middle Last Plaintiff's DOB

Plaintiff's Address:

☐ Plaintiff's address is confidential or ☐ Plaintiff's address is: \_\_\_\_\_

v.

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**2. DEFENDANT**

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First Middle Last Suffix

Defendant's Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

DEFENDANT IDENTIFIERS			
DOB		HEIGHT	
SEX		WEIGHT	
RACE		EYES	
HAIR			
SSN			
DRIVERS LICENSE #			
EXP DATE		STATE	

**CAUTION:**

☐ **Weapon Involved**

☐ **Weapon Present on the Property**

☐ **Weapon Requested Relinquished**

Defendant's Place of employment is: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Check here if you have reason to believe that Defendant is a licensed firearms dealer, employed by a licensed firearms dealer or manufacturer; employed as a writer, researcher, or technician in the firearms or hunting industry, or is required to carry a firearm as a condition of employment.



# Act 79 of 2018

## **Enacted:**

October 12, 2018

## **Effective:**

April 10, 2019

Six-year anniversary of the effective date in just two days!

- ✓ Made changes to the PFA Act and the PA crimes code relating to misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence
- ✓ Deals primarily with safety provisions related to firearms
- ✓ Rules around relinquishment and retrieval of firearms
- ✓ Designed to help prevent domestic violence homicides



# Before and After.... A few examples

## Before

- Firearms/weapons could be relinquished by a Defendant to any “any family or household member”
- Relinquishment, retrieval, and storage of weapons was solely the responsibility of Sheriff’s deputies
- Judges had complete discretion in ordering firearms to be relinquished

## After

- Firearms/weapons can only be relinquished to a law enforcement agency, a licensed federal firearms dealer, commercial armory, or attorney for the defendant
- Relinquishment, retrieval, and storage of weapons can be done by any “appropriate law enforcement agency”
- Judges have more limited discretion in ordering firearms to be relinquished

**Note:** As a result of Act 79, the Protection from Abuse Database was updated to provide greater abilities to mark weapons cautions and ensure law enforcement compliance with relinquishment orders.





# Limits on Judicial Discretion

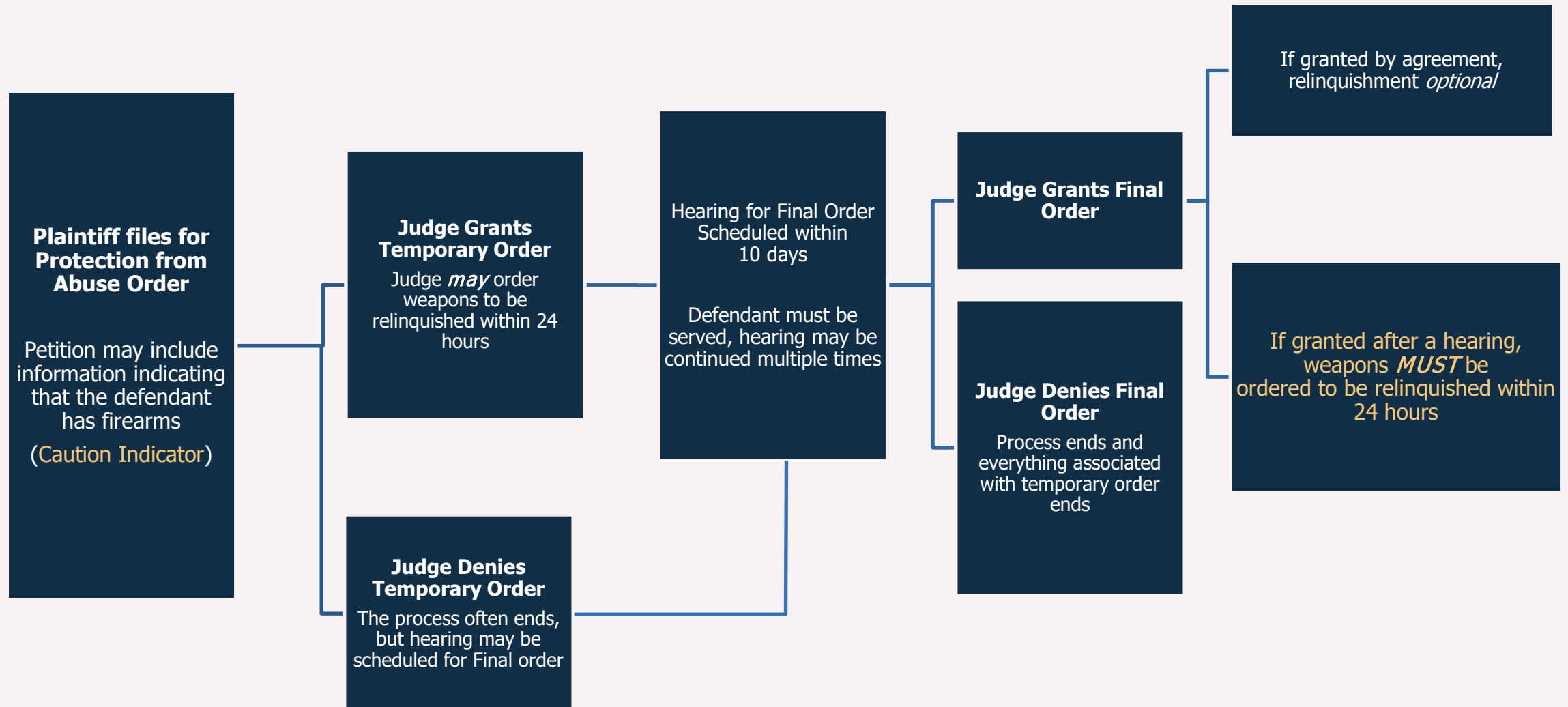
The court MAY order the defendant to relinquish firearms as part of a temporary order if the petition demonstrates (1) abuse involving a firearm OR (2) an immediate and present danger of abuse. 23 Pa.C.S. §6107(b)

A final Protection from Abuse Order entered pursuant to a Consent Agreement between the parties MAY order that the defendant is subject to firearms, other weapons, or ammunition relinquishment. 23 Pa.C.S. §6108(a.1)(2)

Any final Protection from Abuse Order entered into *after a hearing* before the court **MUST** order that the defendant is subject to firearms, other weapons, or ammunition relinquishment. 23 Pa.C.S. §6108(a.1)(1)



# PFA Process Flowchart (Act 79 Impact)



## CONTINUED ATTENTION TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

# PCCD's Office of Gun Violence Prevention

**August of 2019** – Citing a rise in gun violence nationwide and in Pennsylvania, then Governor Wolf signed Executive Order 2019-6 tasking multiple state agencies, including PCCD with undertaking efforts to reduce gun violence

Among other provisions established the **18-member Special Council on Gun Violence and the office of Gun Violence Prevention within PCCD**

- Study and make recommendations to reduce and prevent community gun violence, suicide by firearms, accidental shootings, mass shootings and most importantly for this topic, domestic violence-related shootings.
- Work of the committee culminated in a report of findings, recommendations and Action steps
  - ✓ **Examining the impact and implementation of Act 79 of 2018**

**September 9, 2024** (while we were working on this report) Governor Josh Shapiro signed Executive Order 2024-02, reestablished the Office of Gun Violence Prevention which includes an emphasis on data and research and authorizes continued focus on the intersections of domestic violence with gun violence.



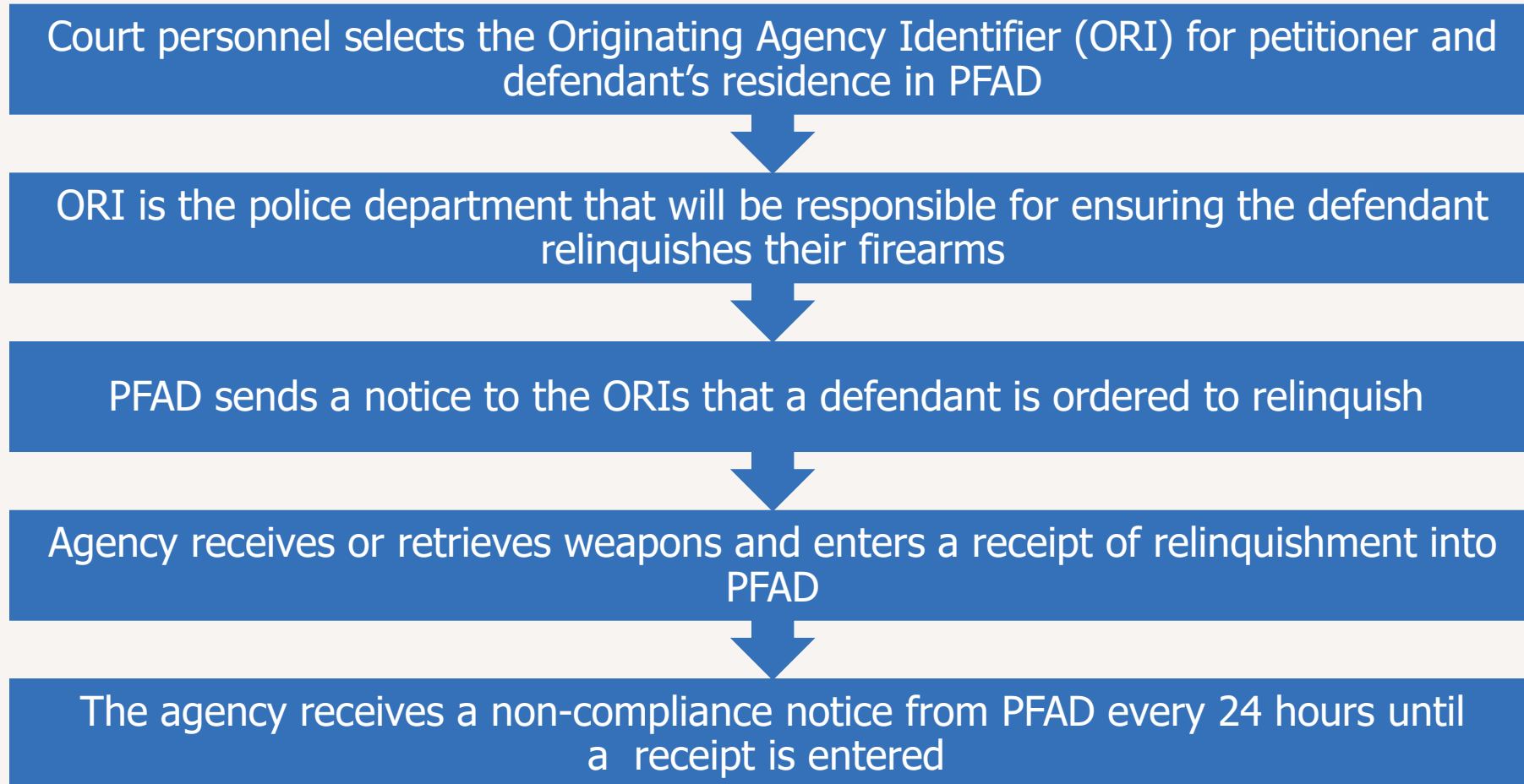
# The Protection from Abuse Database

# The Protection from Abuse Database (PFAD)

[www.pfad.pa.gov](http://www.pfad.pa.gov)

- A registry of all valid temporary and final court orders of protection, court-approved consent agreements
- Key for survivor and law enforcement safety
- Members of the PFA system can request a PFAD account
- Level of access depends on the role
- Feeds into the PA State Police's (PSP) Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network (CLEAN)
- Also tracks firearms relinquishments ordered in PFA cases

# PFAD and Firearms





# Summary of Act 79 Research:

Analysis of Weapons Relinquishments in Protection-from-Abuse Orders in Pennsylvania 2019-2023

# The Data

- **PFA Filings May 2019 – December 2023**
  - ✓ Analyzed Cases – typically made up of multiple filings/orders over time
  - ✓ Connected by unique Case Identification Number
- **Includes data on:**
  - ✓ Weapon cautions noted in PFA petition (weapon present, involved, and/or caution that weapon(s) be relinquished)
  - ✓ Weapons inventory (sometimes included with petition)
  - ✓ Plaintiff/Defendant relationship
  - ✓ Final order by hearing, agreement, or other
  - ✓ Order prohibitions: abuse, contact, other
  - ✓ Weapons relinquishment orders and retrievals
  - ✓ Order expiration



# Research Methods

Calculated yearly, statewide totals from 2020-2023 (partial 2019): **174,996 total cases**

## Cases that ended with no final order:

1. Temporary order not granted (**11,360** cases)
2. Temporary order granted, but case dismissed before a Final PFA Hearing or the Plaintiff failed to appear at the hearing (**97,456** cases)
3. Final order denied (**3,865** cases)

## Cases that ended with a final order:

1. Final order granted by hearing (**21,370** cases)
2. Final order granted by agreement (**24,676** cases)
3. Final order granted by unspecified means (**16,269** cases)



## Research Methods (cont.)

### Differentiated Cases by Various Characteristics

Plaintiff/Defendant relationship

Type of Relief Requested by Plaintiff  
(for protection from abuse and relinquishment of weapons)

Length of Order  
(up to 3 years)

Inclusion or Exclusion of weapons  
cautions  
(from petition)



## Research Methods (cont.)

### Differentiated Cases by Various Characteristics

Calculated case growth rates from 2020 to 2023, by state and county

Calculated totals/rates of cases with weapons relinquishment caution (in petition), with final weapons relinquishment orders, and with verified relinquishments

Calculated yearly case prevalence across PA households, by state and county

Identified and calculated which Law Enforcement departments were carrying out weapons retrievals



ANALYSIS OF WEAPONS RELINQUISHMENTS IN PROTECTION-FROM-ABUSE ORDERS IN PENNSYLVANIA 2019-2023

# Statewide PFA Cases

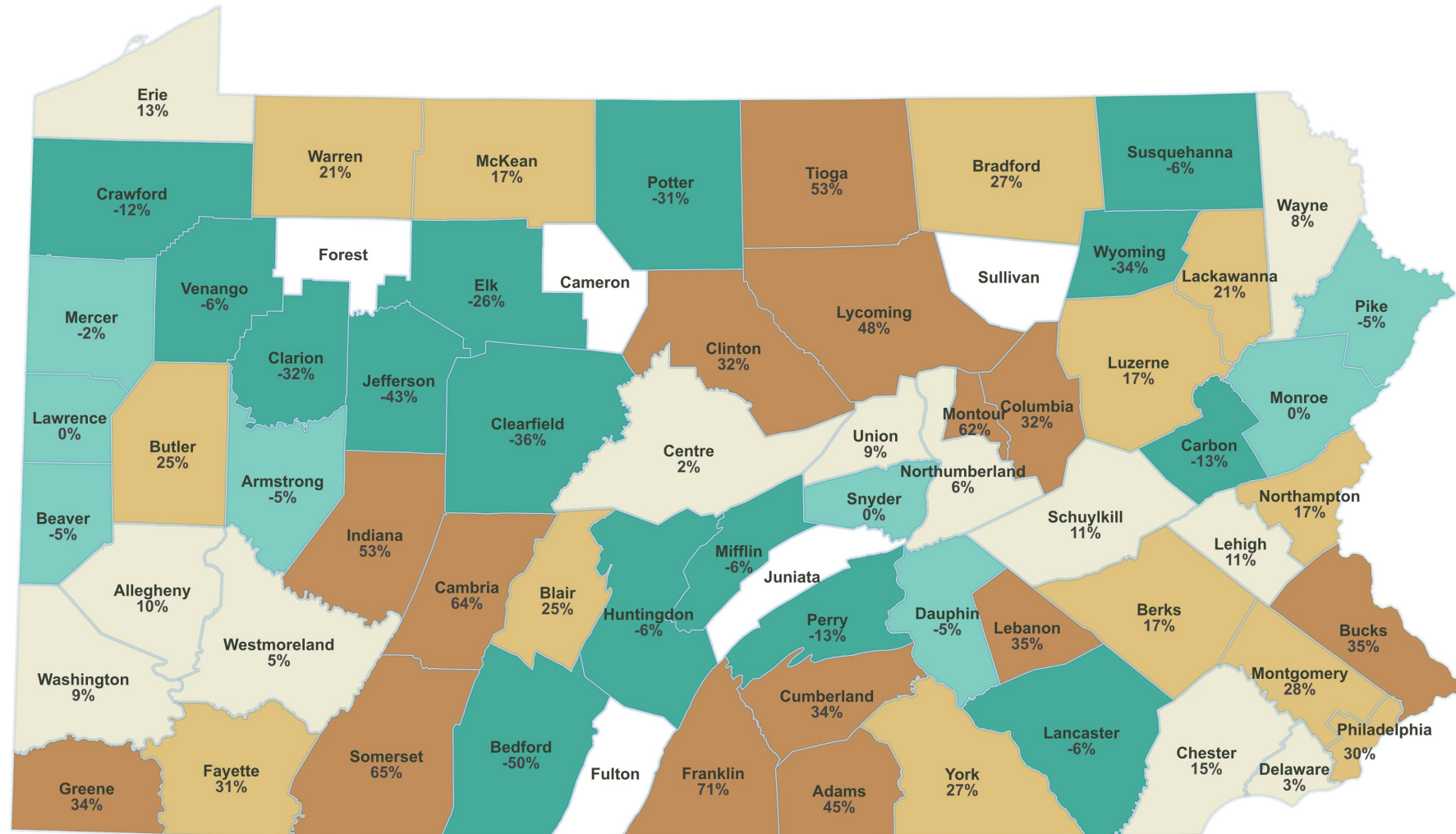
	<u>Cases with Temporary PFA Hearing Only</u>		<u>Cases with Final Order Dispositions</u>				<b>Total</b>
<b>Year</b>	<b>Ungranted</b>	<b>Granted</b>	<b>Denied</b>	<b>Granted By Hearing</b>	<b>Granted By Agreement</b>	<b>Granted: Unspecified</b>	
<b>2019*</b>	<b>1,777</b>	<b>15,219</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>3,405</b>	<b>4,716</b>	<b>2,990</b>	<b>28,712</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>2,303</b>	<b>18,955</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>3,964</b>	<b>4,703</b>	<b>2,897</b>	<b>33,550</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>2,253</b>	<b>20,142</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>4,433</b>	<b>5,051</b>	<b>3,465</b>	<b>36,173</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>2,470</b>	<b>21,063</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>4,661</b>	<b>5,181</b>	<b>3,547</b>	<b>37,733</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>2,557</b>	<b>22,077</b>	<b>892</b>	<b>4,907</b>	<b>5,025</b>	<b>3,370</b>	<b>38,828</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,360</b>	<b>97,456</b>	<b>3,865</b>	<b>21,370</b>	<b>24,676</b>	<b>16,269</b>	<b>174,996</b>
<i>2020-2023 Growth</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>24%</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>16%</i>





# ANALYSIS OF WEAPONS RELINQUISHMENTS IN PROTECTION-FROM-ABUSE ORDERS IN PENNSYLVANIA 2019-2023

## 2020-23 PFA Case Growth



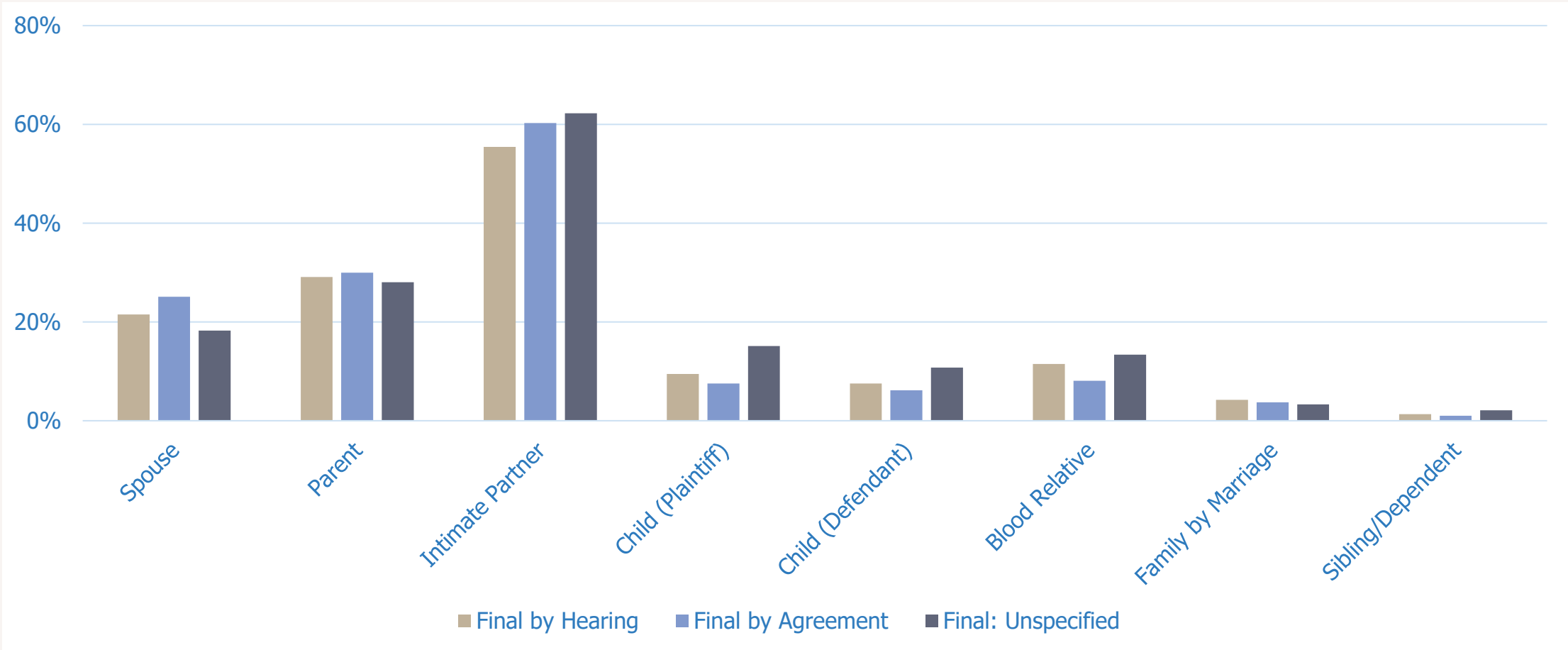
**ANALYSIS OF WEAPONS RELINQUISHMENTS IN PROTECTION-FROM-ABUSE ORDERS IN PENNSYLVANIA 2019-2023**

# PFA Case Prevalence

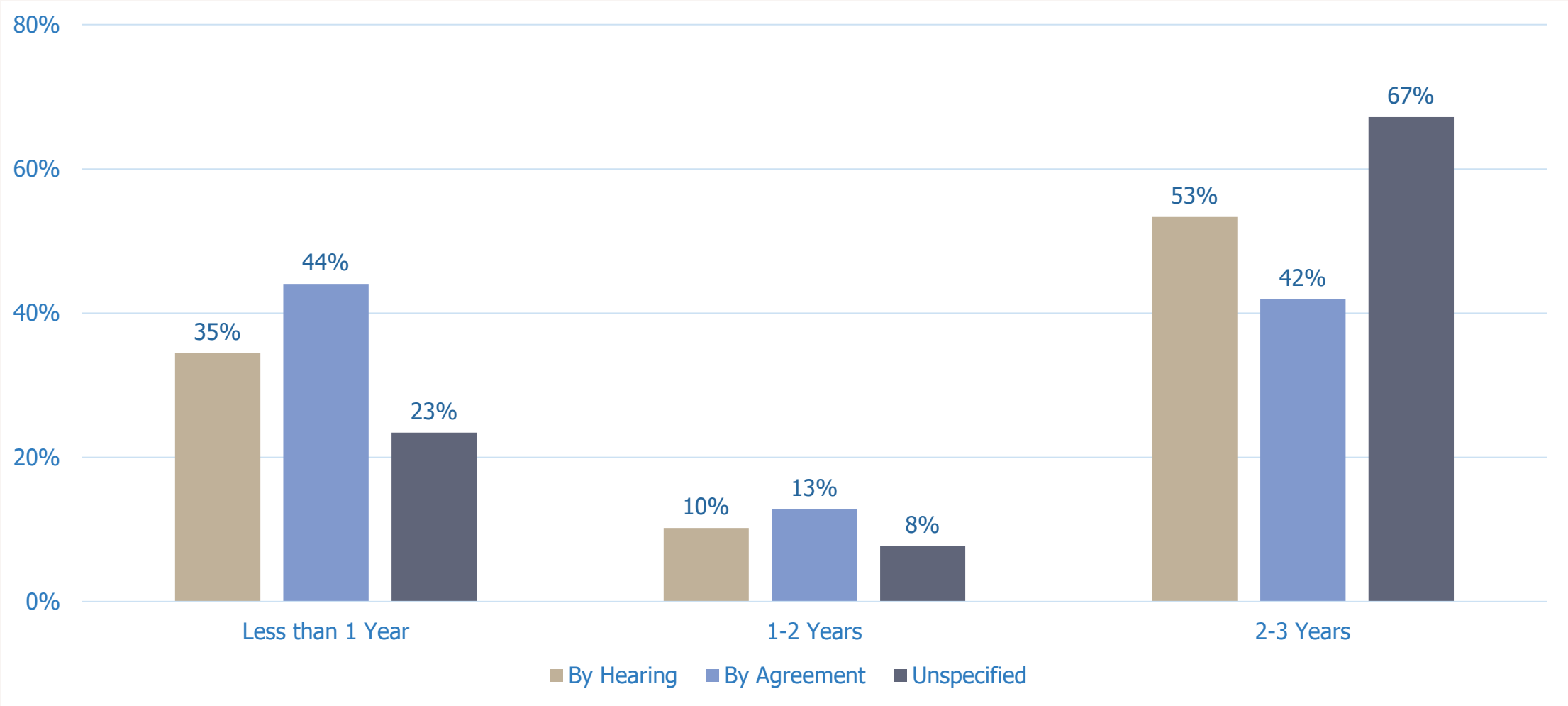
		Per 100,000 Households		
Year	Households	Cases with Temporary PFA Hearing Only	Cases with a Final Order Disposition	Total Cases
2020	5,742,828	370	214	584
2021	5,228,956	428	263	692
2022	5,294,065	445	268	713
2023	5,435,277	453	261	714



# Plaintiff/Defendant Relationships (Final Orders)



# Final PFA Order Expiration



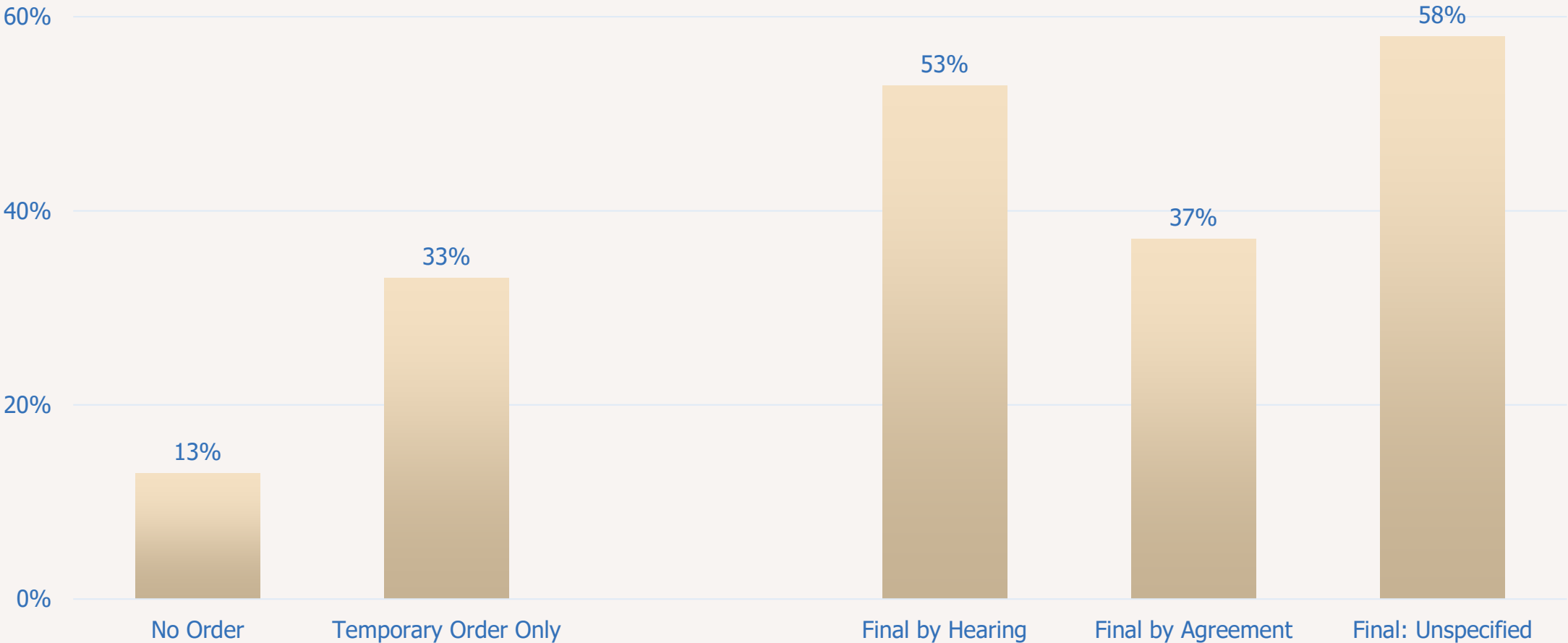
**ANALYSIS OF WEAPONS RELINQUISHMENTS IN PROTECTION-FROM-ABUSE ORDERS IN PENNSYLVANIA 2019-2023**

## Cases with Petitions Indicating Weapons to be Relinquished

Year	Across Cases with Temporary PFA Hearing Only	% of Temporary Hearings	Across Cases with Final PFA Order	% of Cases with Final PFA Order
2019*	3,516	23%	3,975	36%
2020	5,843	31%	5,081	44%
2021	6,818	34%	6,366	49%
2022	7,745	37%	7,158	53%
2023	8,302	38%	7,316	55%
Total	32,224	33%	29,896	48%
<i>2020-2023 Growth</i>	42%		44%	

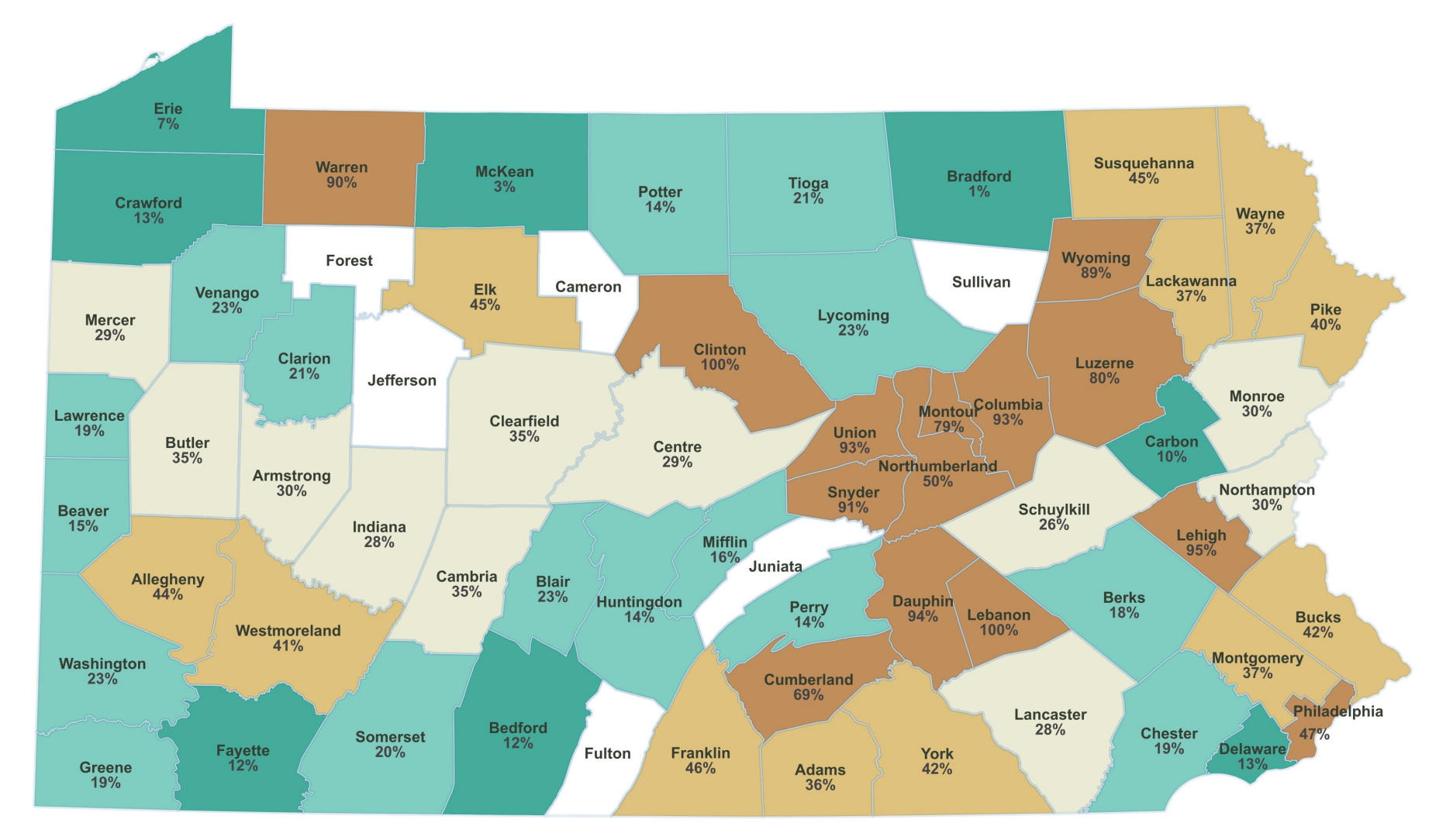


# Percentage of Relinquishment Cautions to Cases





# Percentage of Relinquishment Cautions to Cases



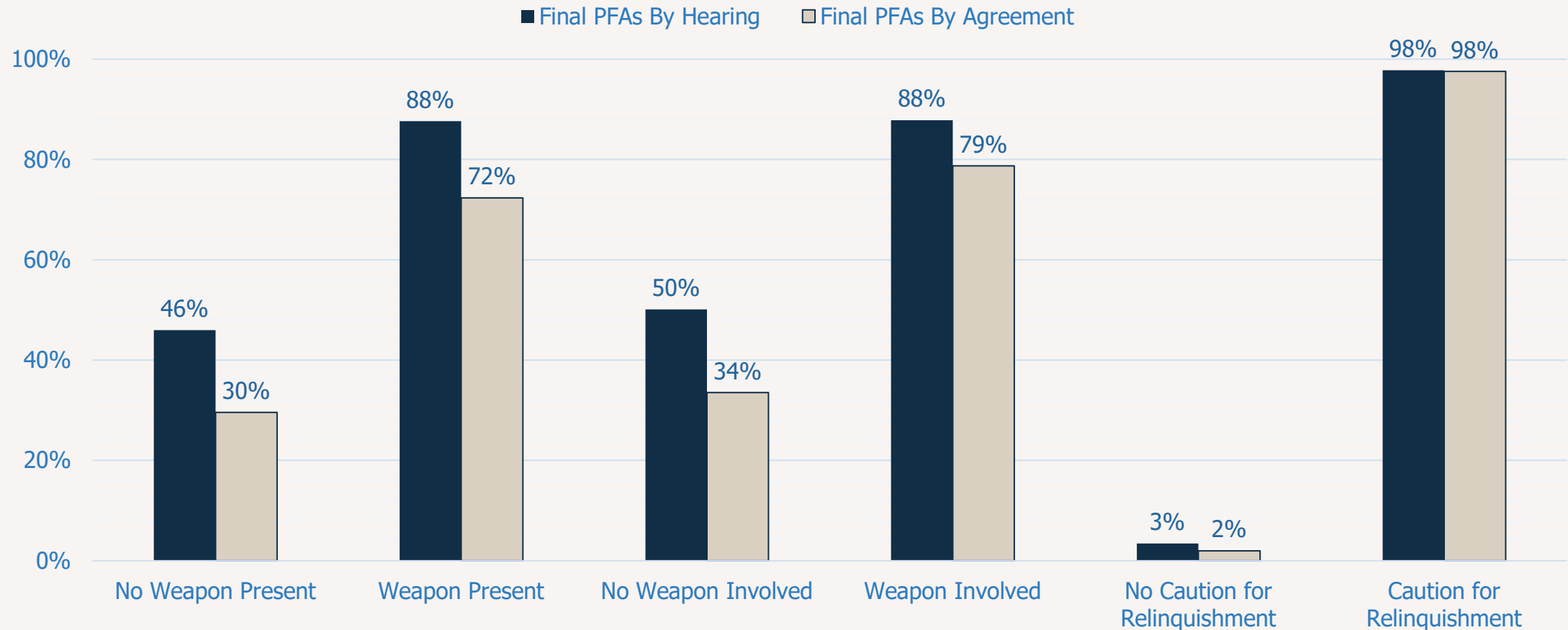
# Percentage of Relinquishment Orders to Cases

	<u>Cases</u>	<u>Cases Ending in Final Hearing/Agreement</u>			
Year	<u>Ending w/ Temporary Hearing</u>	Denied <sup>1</sup>	By Hearing	By Agreement	Unspecified
2020	30%	27%	47%	34%	29%
2021	31%	31%	55%	39%	31%
2022	34%	31%	58%	40%	36%
2023	35%	29%	60%	41%	39%
<i>Growth in Relinquishment Orders</i>	33%	31%	58%	30%	10%

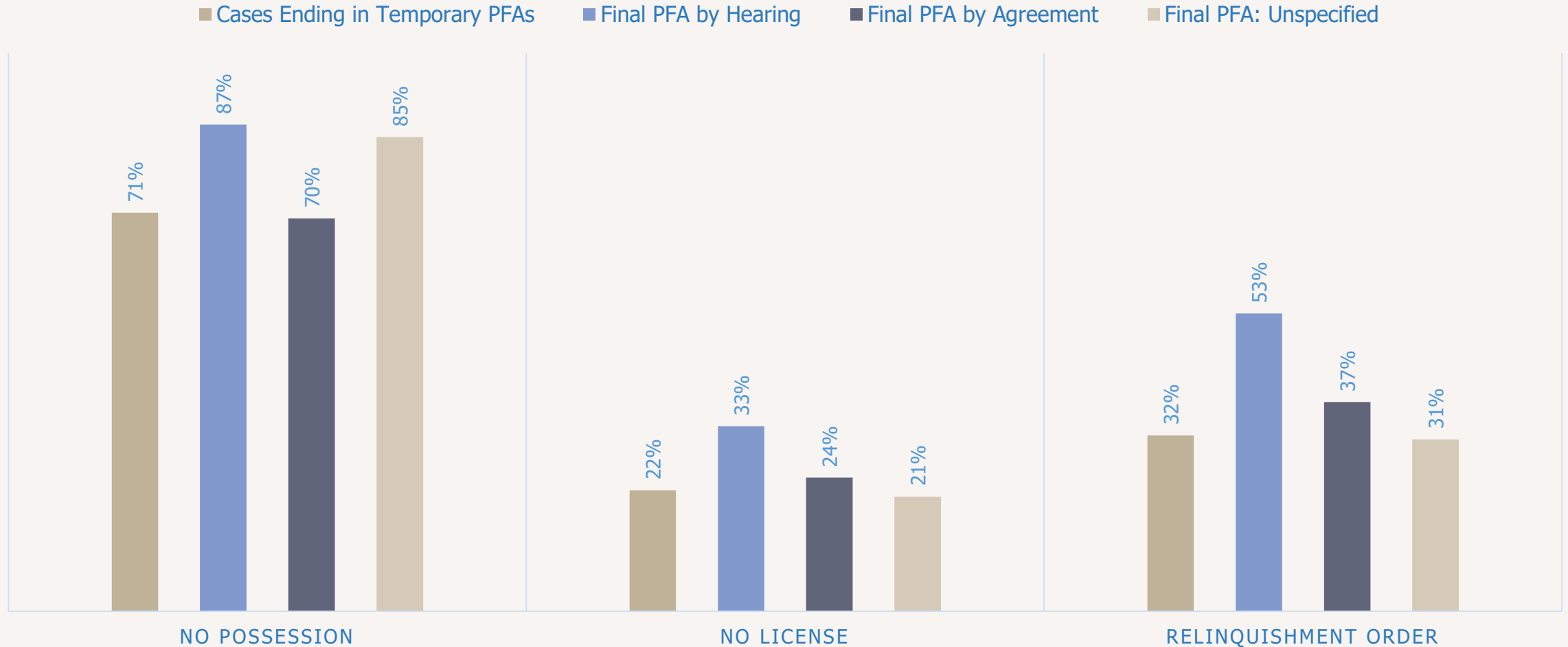
*Note: This and the following results do not include Lehigh and Philadelphia Counties.*



## Percentage of Final PFA Orders/Agreements with Relinquishment Orders by Type of Weapons Caution



# PFA Orders with Weapons Restrictions



ANALYSIS OF WEAPONS RELINQUISHMENTS IN PROTECTION-FROM-ABUSE ORDERS IN  
PENNSYLVANIA 2019-2023

# Final PFA & ROs and Retrievals

Year	(1) PFA Orders	(2) PFAs with Relinquishment Caution in Petition	(3) PFAs with Relinquishment Orders	(4) Ratio: (3) / (2)	(5) Retrievals of ROs	(6) % of ROs Retrieved
2020	9,607	3,704	3,742	101%	3,153	84%
2021	10,814	4,830	4,828	100%	4,017	83%
2022	10,816	5,121	5,124	100%	4,227	82%
2023	10,688	5,326	5,326	100%	4,285	80%
<i>20-23 Growth in ROs</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>44%</i>	<i>42%</i>		<i>36%</i>	



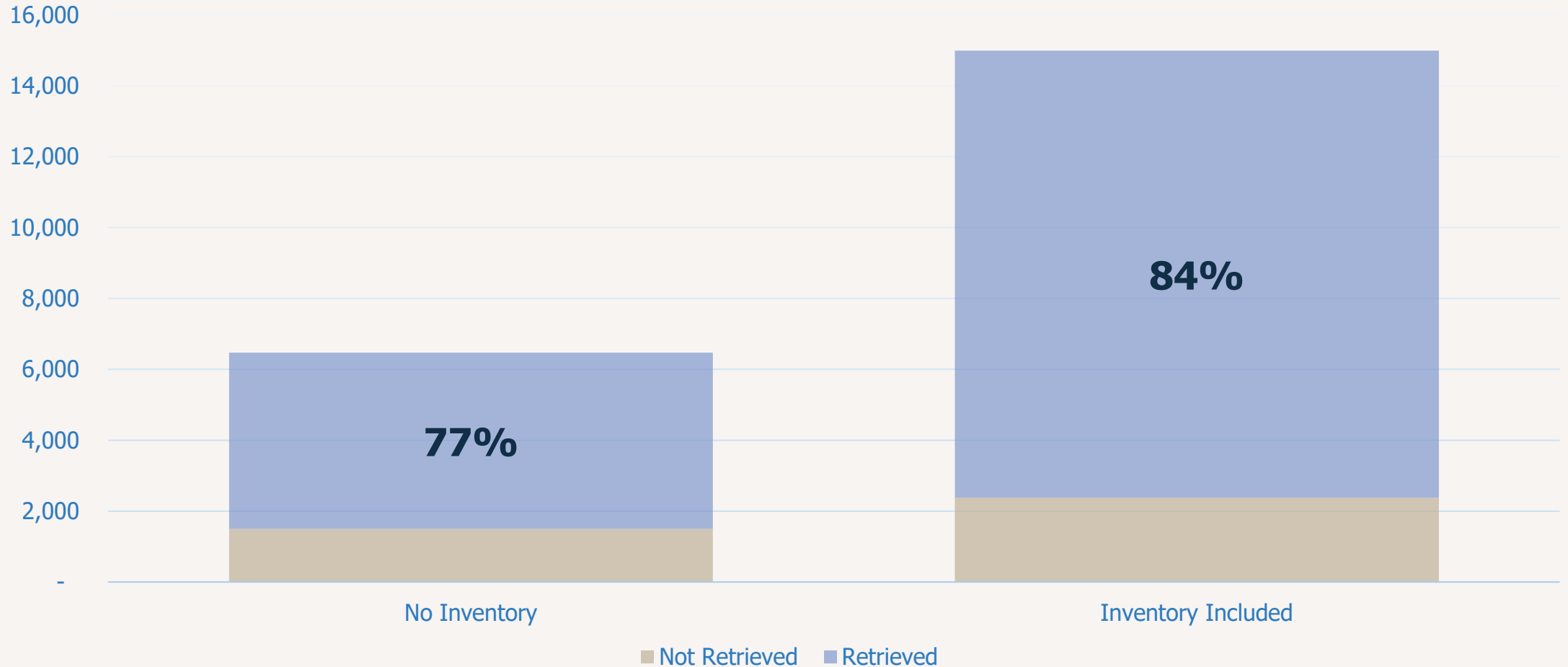
ANALYSIS OF WEAPONS RELINQUISHMENTS IN PROTECTION-FROM-ABUSE ORDERS IN  
PENNSYLVANIA 2019-2023

# Retrieval Rates

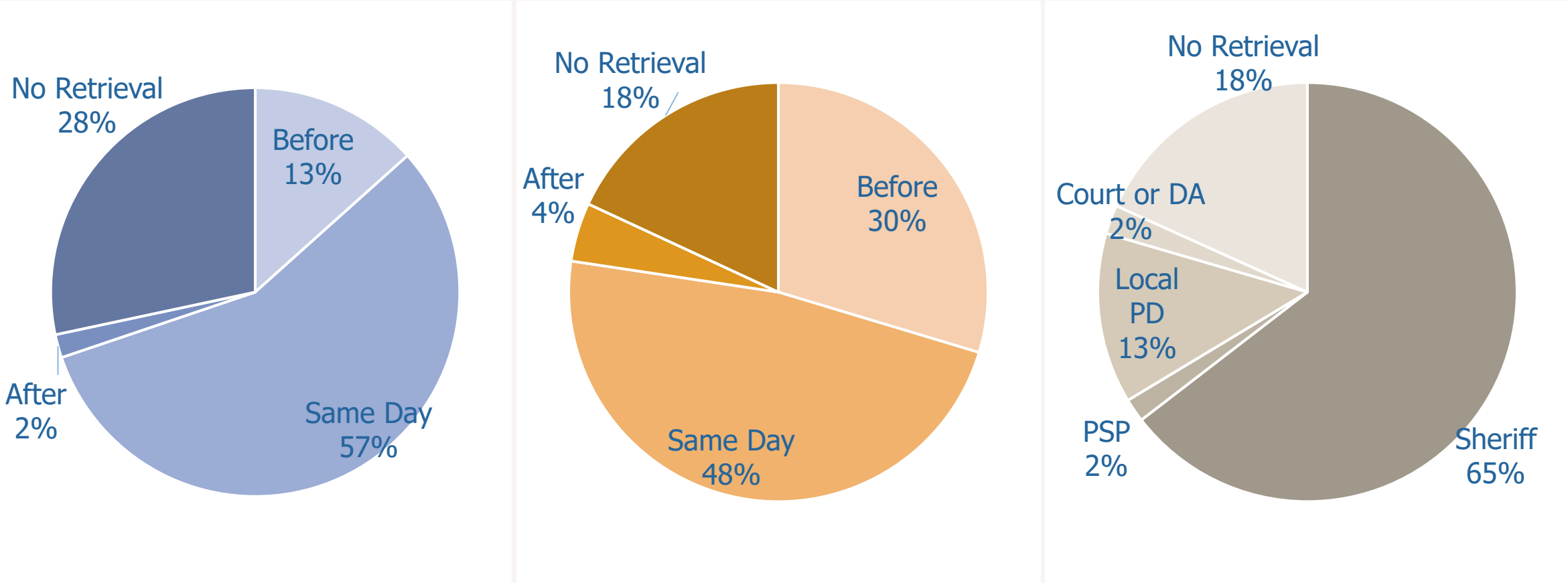
	<u>By Hearing</u>		<u>By Agreement</u>		<u>Unknown / Unspecified</u>	
Year	Final ROs	% Retrieved	Final ROs	% Retrieved	Final ROs	% Retrieved
2019*	1,451	78%	1,495	80%	203	71%
2020	1,876	82%	1,597	88%	269	74%
2021	2,426	82%	1,994	86%	408	74%
2022	2,692	81%	2,084	87%	348	65%
2023	2,955	80%	2,075	84%	296	60%
20-23	58%		30%		10%	
Growth		53%		24%		-11%



# Retrieval Rates for Cases With a Weapons Inventory



Retrieval of Weapons when PFA includes a Relinquishment Order



Temporary Orders Only

Final Orders

Retrieval Departments





# Factors Affecting Final PFA and WR Orders

Based on information given in the petition:

- Petitions that include a Weapons Order Caution (vs. those that do not):
  - Have 1.5X higher odds of resulting in a final PFA order ( $p<0.001$ )
  - Have >90X higher odds of resulting in a final WR order ( $p<0.001$ )
- Petitions that include a Weapons Inventory:
  - Have >16% higher odds of resulting in a final PFA order ( $p<0.001$ )
  - Have >100X higher odds of resulting in a final WR order ( $p<0.001$ )
- Petitions with Weapons Present or Involved Cautions are not more likely to result in a Final PFA Order

*\* Estimated with Logistic Regressions controlling for year and county (Lehigh and Philadelphia not included)*



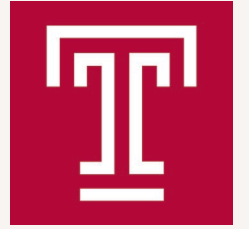
# Practitioner Takeaways

- ✓ Plaintiff requests for weapons relinquishment at the petition phase of the process are highly influential as related to final PFA orders that include a requirement that weapons be relinquished.
- ✓ The rate of PFA filing increasing at a slower rate than the increase in requests for and inclusion of firearms relinquishment orders may point to increased awareness of the danger of firearms and relief available under PA law.
- ✓ The decrease in consent agreement rates may be related to increased firearm relinquishments, given that the latter's increase was at a greater rate than the increase in PFA filing over the same time period.
  - Such trends also address concerns raised by other reports about the Court's overreliance on consent agreements to resolve PFAs. (See: Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts. (2021). *2021 Pennsylvania Protection Order Project: Statewide report*. Center for Court Innovation. Pgs. 10-11.)
- ✓ There are growing opportunities for education, training and technical assistance around the provisions of Act 79 to help strengthen the protections provided and improve consistency of implementation statewide.



Next steps:  
Qualitative research by Temple University

# Qualitative Research: Data Access



**Analyzing Procedural Documents**

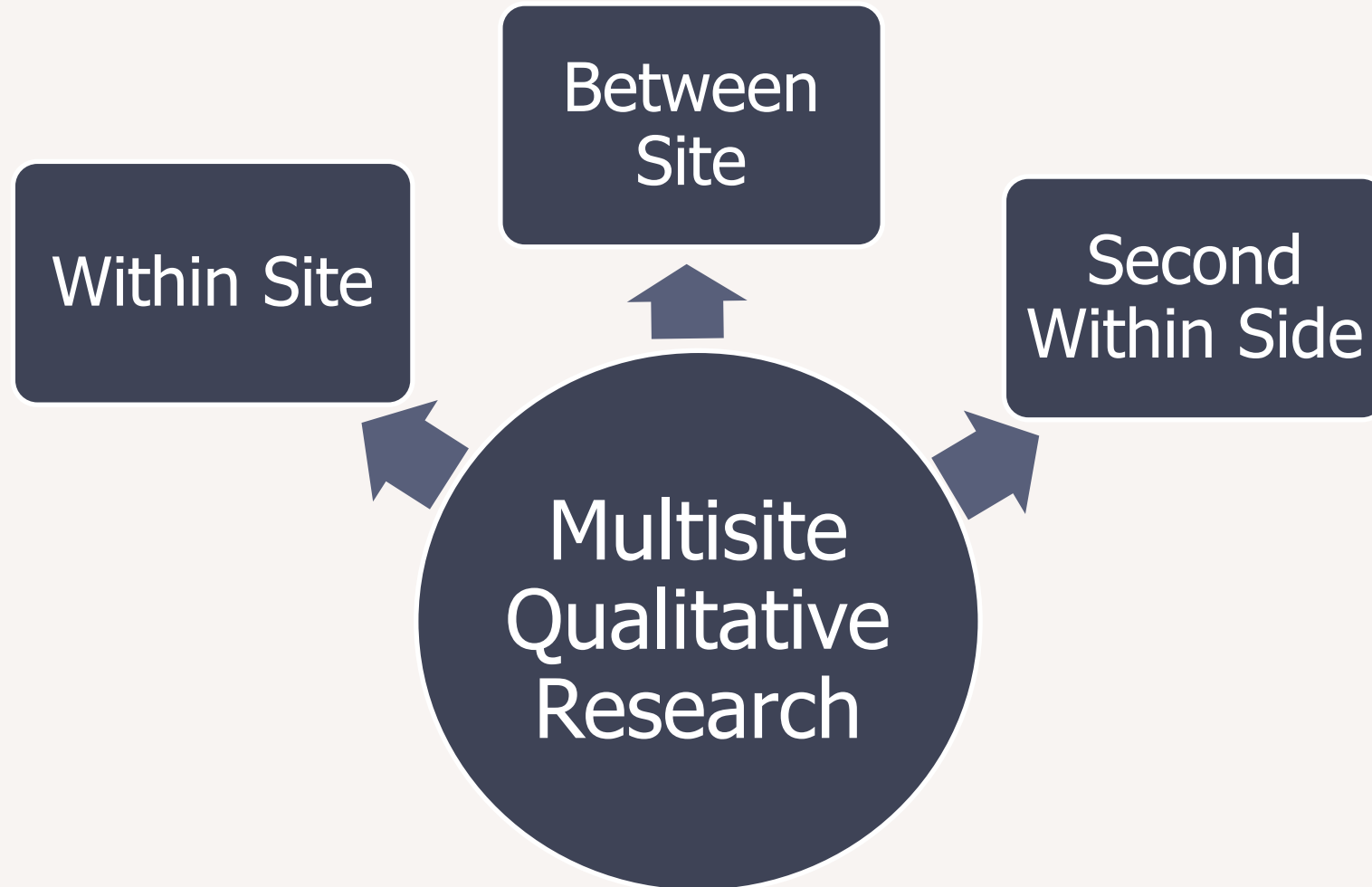
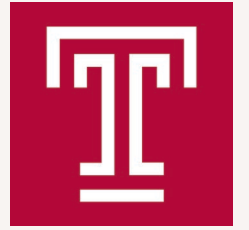


**Conducting Court Observations**

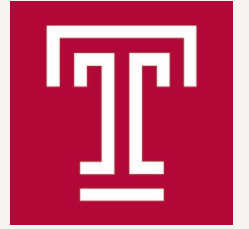


**Interviewing Judges, Sheriffs, Victim  
Advocacy Groups, and Survivors**

# Qualitative Research: Data Analysis



# Qualitative Research: Deliverables



[sites.temple.edu/act79](https://sites.temple.edu/act79)

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Thanks for joining us!