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‘Red flag’ laws can have deadly consequences

Walter Olson

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The Aug. 9 front-page article [“Results of ‘red flag’ gun laws uneven across 17 states, D.C.”](#) quoted critics of Maryland’s “red flag” gun-confiscation law who find the law lacking on due process grounds. It might also have mentioned another kind of collateral damage done by the law this past November in its second month of operation, namely the death of 61-year-old Gary J. Willis of Glen Burnie, shot dead by Anne Arundel County police who had come to his door at 5 a.m. to present an order to confiscate his guns. Willis answered the door with a gun in his hand. He set it down but then became angry, picked up the gun, and, in an ensuing scuffle with an officer over the weapon, it went off without striking anyone. A second officer then shot Willis dead.

In the aftermath, because of confidentiality rules, neither press nor public could view the red-flag order that had set police on the fatal encounter. Defending the shooting afterward, the county’s police chief described any possible threat from Willis to others in the vaguest of terms, telling the [Capital Gazette](#), “We don’t know what we prevented or could’ve prevented.” Family member Michele Willis, speaking to the [Baltimore Sun](#), took a different view: “I’m just dumbfounded right now,” she said. “My uncle wouldn’t hurt anybody. ... They didn’t need to do what they did.”

Walter Olson is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute’s Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies and is known for his writing on the American legal system.