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HONORABLE RICHARD A. JONES

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
AT SEATTLE

DUY T. MAI,

Plaintiff,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, et al.,

Defendants.

CASE NO. C17-0561 RAJ

ORDER

I. INTRODUCTION

This matter comes before the Court on Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss. Dkt. # 4. Plaintiff Duy T. Mai opposes the Motion. Dkt. # 6. For the reasons that follow, the Court **GRANTS** Defendants’ Motion.

II. BACKGROUND

The following is taken from Plaintiff’s Complaint, which is assumed to be true for the purposes of this motion to dismiss. *Sanders v. Brown*, 504 F.3d 903, 910 (9th Cir. 2007).

Plaintiff brings this action against Defendants United States of America; the Department of Justice (“DOJ”); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (“ATF”); the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”); Jefferson B. Sessions

1 III, as Attorney General; Andrew McCabe, as Acting Director of the FBI; and Thomas E.
2 Brandon, as Acting Director of the ATF, for alleged violations of his Second and Fifth
3 Amendment rights. Dkt. # 1 ¶¶ 1.1-1.8, 4.1, 4.2.

4 In October of 1999, when Plaintiff was seventeen (17) years old, he was
5 involuntarily committed for mental health treatment by the King County Superior Court.
6 Plaintiff's commitment expired by August 8, 2000¹, and he has not been committed since.
7 *Id.* ¶ 3.1. In 2001, Plaintiff enrolled in Evergreen Community College where he
8 completed his GED and earned college credit that enabled him to transfer to the
9 University of Washington. *Id.* ¶ 3.3. Plaintiff graduated from the University of
10 Washington with a bachelor's of science degree in microbiology. After graduating,
11 Plaintiff enrolled in a master's program at the University of Southern California. *Id.* He
12 graduated with a master's degree in microbiology in 2009. Plaintiff then began working
13 at Benaroya Research Institute. As part of his job, he successfully passed an FBI
14 background check. *Id.* ¶ 3.4. In October of 2016, Plaintiff began working for Fred
15 Hutchinson Cancer Research Center as an immune monitoring specialist and is currently
16 employed there. *Id.* ¶ 3.6.

17 In 2014, Plaintiff petitioned the King County Superior Court under Washington
18 statute RCW 9.41.047 for restoration of his firearm rights. Plaintiff supplied the court
19 with medical and psychological examinations and supportive declarations. His petition
20 was granted. *Id.* ¶ 3.9. Plaintiff then attempted to purchase a firearm and received a
21 denial from the National Instant Criminal Background Check System ("NICS"). NICS
22 informed him that the denial was based on 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4). *Id.* ¶ 3.10. Plaintiff
23 subsequently received a phone call from the ATF, notifying him that the ATF legal
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26
27 ¹ Plaintiff does not provide further explanation as to what this "expiration" entails.
Therefore, the Court presumes that Plaintiff was released from his commitment on that date.

1 department determined that his state restoration order was not sufficient to overcome the
2 federal prohibition in 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4). *Id.* ¶ 3.11.

3 On April 11, 2017, Plaintiff filed a complaint alleging that Defendants violated his
4 Second Amendment and Fifth Amendment rights by denying him the ability to “keep,
5 bear and purchase” firearms. *Id.* ¶¶ 4.1, 4.2.

6 **III. LEGAL STANDARD**

7 **A. FRCP 12(b)(6)**

8 Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) permits a court to dismiss a complaint for failure to state a
9 claim. The rule requires the court to assume the truth of the complaint’s factual
10 allegations and credit all reasonable inferences arising from those allegations. *Sanders v.*
11 *Brown*, 504 F.3d 903, 910 (9th Cir. 2007). A court “need not accept as true conclusory
12 allegations that are contradicted by documents referred to in the complaint.” *Manzarek v.*
13 *St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co.*, 519 F.3d 1025, 1031 (9th Cir. 2008). The plaintiff must
14 point to factual allegations that “state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell*
15 *Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 568 (2007). If the plaintiff succeeds, the complaint
16 avoids dismissal if there is “any set of facts consistent with the allegations in the
17 complaint” that would entitle the plaintiff to relief. *Id.* at 563; *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S.
18 662, 679 (2009).

19 A court typically cannot consider evidence beyond the four corners of the
20 complaint, although it may rely on a document to which the complaint refers if the
21 document is central to the party’s claims and its authenticity is not in question. *Marder v.*
22 *Lopez*, 450 F.3d 445, 448 (9th Cir. 2006). A court may also consider evidence subject to
23 judicial notice. *United States v. Ritchie*, 342 F.3d 903, 908 (9th Cir. 2003).

24 **IV. DISCUSSION**

25 **A. Federal Statutory and Regulatory Background**

26 Under 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4), it is unlawful for any person “who has been
27 adjudicated as a mental defective or who has been committed to a mental institution” to

1 purchase a firearm. 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4); 17 C.F.R. § 478.11. 18 U.S.C. § 925(c)
2 provides for a “relief-from-disability” program to be administered through the Attorney
3 General. This program was defunded in 1992. Dkt. # 1. ¶ 3.12. In 2008, Congress
4 passed the NICS Improvements Amendments Act (“NIAA”). Pub. L. No. 110-180,
5 122 Stat. 2559. The NIAA authorizes federal grants to states to assist them in
6 determining which individuals are eligible to purchase and possess firearms and to aid
7 them in supplying accurate information to federal databases. *Id.* To be eligible for these
8 grants, a state must certify to the Attorney General that it has implemented a relief-from-
9 disabilities program under which an individual who, pursuant to state law, has been
10 adjudicated “mentally defective” or has been “committed to a mental institution” may
11 apply for “relief from the disabilities imposed” by 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4). Pub. L. No.
12 110-180, §§ 103-105, 121 Stat. 2559, 2568-69 (2008).

13 A qualifying state program shall grant relief if “the circumstances regarding the
14 disabilities . . . and the person’s record and reputation, are such that the person will not be
15 likely to act in a manner dangerous to public safety and that the granting of the relief
16 would not be contrary to the public interest.” *Id.* The NIAA requires that a state court or
17 other lawful authority reviewing a petition for relief from a firearms disability imposed
18 by 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) consider three factors when determining whether to grant or
19 deny the requested relief: (1) the circumstances regarding the firearms disability imposed
20 by 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4); (2) the petitioner’s “record”; and (3) the petitioner’s
21 “reputation”. *Id.* § 105(a)(2). The NIAA also requires that when a state court or other
22 lawful authority grants a petitioner relief from a firearms disability, the court must find
23 that the petitioner “will not be likely to act in a manner dangerous to public safety,” and
24 that “the granting of the relief would not be contrary to the public interest.”
25 *Id.* § 105(a)(2).

26 Washington State’s restoration statute pre-dates the NIAA. RCW 9.41.047. This
27 statute does not comply with the NIAA because the provisions for restoration of rights

1 after involuntary commitment do not meet the requirements of the federal statute.
2 Dkt. # 4 at 5. Plaintiff argues that because he is unable to obtain restoration of his right
3 to possess firearms through the state of Washington's program, he has no relief available
4 to him and he is subject to a lifetime prohibition on firearm possession in violation of his
5 Second and Fifth Amendment rights.

6 **B. Second Amendment Claim**

7 *a. Conduct Protected by the Second Amendment*

8 The Second Amendment confers "an individual right to keep and bear arms."
9 *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, 575 (2008). In *Heller*, the Supreme Court
10 considered whether the District of Columbia's regulations barring the possession of
11 handguns both inside and outside the home, and requiring that other firearms be kept
12 "unloaded and disassembled or bound by a trigger lock or similar device," violated the
13 plaintiff's Second Amendment Rights. *Id.* at 628-29. After undergoing a historical
14 analysis of the original meaning of the amendment, the Supreme Court concluded that the
15 right of self-defense was central to the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms
16 and found that prohibiting the possession of handguns was unconstitutional. *Id.* The
17 Supreme Court also found that the District of Columbia's requirement that other firearms
18 in the home be "rendered and kept inoperable at all times" made it impossible for citizens
19 to use firearms for self-defense, and thus, was also unconstitutional. *Id.* at 630. In
20 undertaking its analysis regarding the impact of the District of Columbia's regulations on
21 the plaintiff's Second Amendment rights, the Supreme Court noted that "the right secured
22 by the Second Amendment is not unlimited," and that "nothing in our opinion should be
23 taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons
24 and the mentally ill" *Id.* at 626-27. In a footnote, the *Heller* Court referred to these
25 "longstanding prohibitions" as "presumptively lawful regulatory measures." *Id.* at 626
26 n.26.

1 The Ninth Circuit has interpreted the *Heller* decision to suggest a two-step inquiry
2 for addressing Second Amendment challenges to regulations. *Jackson v. City & Cty. of*
3 *S.F.*, 746 F.3d 953, 960 (9th Cir. 2014). This two-step inquiry, “(1) asks whether the
4 challenged law burdens conduct protected by the Second Amendment” based on a
5 historical understanding of the scope of the Second Amendment, “and (2) if so, directs
6 courts to apply an appropriate level of scrutiny.” *Id.* (citing *United States v. Chovan*, 735
7 F.3d 1127, 1136 (9th Cir. 2013)). “To determine whether a challenged law falls outside
8 the historical scope of the Second Amendment, we ask whether the regulation is one of
9 the ‘presumptively lawful regulatory measures’ identified in *Heller*, or whether the record
10 includes persuasive historical evidence establishing that the regulation at issue imposes
11 prohibitions that fall outside the historical scope of the Second Amendment.” *Id.*
12 (quoting *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 627 n. 26); *see also Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1137. 18 U.S.C. §
13 922(g)(4), which is a prohibition on the possession of firearms by the mentally ill, is a
14 “presumptively lawful regulatory measure.” Thus, analysis of the constitutionality of the
15 regulation need not proceed to the second step of the inquiry.

16 Plaintiff argues that the language in *Heller* only established a presumption that
17 such bans are lawful, and as such, it left open the possibility of an as-applied
18 constitutional challenge to 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4). Specifically, Plaintiff argues that the
19 statute is unconstitutional as applied to him because he has had no mental health issues
20 since he was involuntarily committed at the age of 17. Plaintiff further argues that an
21 involuntary commitment does not equate to mental illness such that it provides a basis for
22 a permanent limitation on his right to bear arms. The Ninth Circuit has yet to rule on a
23 Second Amendment challenge to 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) in a published opinion, but it has
24 rejected as-applied challenges to 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1), which prohibits felons from
25 possessing firearms, also one of the enumerated “presumptively legal regulatory
26 measures” in *Heller*. *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 626-27. While the historical reasons for
27 prohibiting felons from possessing firearms differ slightly from those relevant to the

1 | mentally ill, these cases provide insight as to how the Ninth Circuit views the regulatory
2 | measures listed as “presumptively lawful” with regards to as-applied challenges.

3 | In *United States v. Vongxay*, 594 F.3d 1111 (9th Cir. 2010), the Ninth Circuit
4 | expressly rejected the defendant’s argument that the “presumptively legal” language in
5 | *Heller* was not binding, stating that the language was “integral” to the holding. *Id.* at
6 | 1115. Citing the Supreme Court’s commentary regarding the longstanding prohibitions
7 | on the possession of firearms, the court specifically stated that felons, by virtue of being
8 | included among those that have long been prohibited from possessing firearms, are
9 | “categorically different from the individuals who have a fundamental right to bear arms.”
10 | *Id.* The court then rejected the defendant’s as-applied challenge to the statute based on
11 | *Heller* and its holding in *United States v. Younger*, 398 F.3d 1179 (9th Cir. 2005)².
12 | *Id.* at 1116 (stating that its holding is “buttressed by the fact that *Younger* upheld the very
13 | type of gun possession restriction that the Supreme Court deemed ‘presumptively
14 | lawful’”). Referring to its decision in *Younger*, the court also noted that it declined to
15 | make a distinction between violent and non-violent felons and held that section
16 | 922(g)(1), which prohibits all felons from possessing firearms, was constitutional. *Id.*
17 | The holding in *Vongxay* continued to be upheld in several decisions involving as-applied
18 | challenges to section 922(g)(1), including the decision in *United States v. Phillips*, 827
19 | F.3d 1171 (9th Cir. 2016). In *Phillips*, the Ninth Circuit rejected the defendant’s
20 | argument that his conviction for a non-violent felony could not constitutionally serve as a
21 | basis for depriving him of his right to possess a firearm, noting that it was “hard pressed”
22 |

23 |
24 | ² The circuit court noted that it held that 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1) does not violate the
25 | Second Amendment rights of a convicted felon in its decision in *United States v. Younger*, 398
26 | F.3d 1179 (9th Cir. 2005). However, the holding upon which *Younger* was based was partially
27 | invalidated by the decision in *Heller*. Citing to *In re Osborne*, 76 F.3d 306 (9th Cir. 1996), the
court concluded that, because only a court *en banc* has the authority to overrule a decision of a
previous panel, and the doctrine of *stare decisis* concerns the holdings of previous cases, not the
rationales, *Younger* still controls. *Vongxay*, 594 F.3d at 1116.

1 to conclude that a felony “cannot serve as the basis of a felon firearm ban, simply
2 because its *actus reus* may appear innocuous.” *Phillips*, 827 F. 3d at 1176; *see also*
3 *United States v. Chovan*, 735 F.3d 1127, (9th Cir. 2013); *Van Der Hule v. Holder*, 759
4 F.3d 1043, 1050–51 (9th Cir. 2014).

5 Further, the Ninth Circuit has ruled on a Second Amendment challenge to
6 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) in one unpublished opinion. While the decision is not
7 precedential, it is instructive regarding this circuit’s approach to as-applied challenges to
8 the statute. In *Petramala v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, the Ninth Circuit affirmed a district
9 court’s finding that the language in *Heller* was appropriate as applied to restrict the
10 plaintiff’s right to possess firearms. *See Petramala v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 481 F. App’x
11 395, 396 (9th Cir. 2012); *see also Petramala v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, No. CV 10-2002-
12 PHX-FJM, 2011 WL 3880826, at *2 (D. Ariz. Sept. 2, 2011), *aff’d*, 481 F. App’x 395
13 (9th Cir. 2012). The plaintiff argued that section 922(g)(4) unconstitutionally deprived
14 him of his right to possess firearms because he was not a danger to himself or others and
15 should not be classified as mentally defective. *Id.* Citing to the “longstanding
16 prohibition” language in *Heller*, the Ninth Circuit found that the district court properly
17 dismissed the plaintiff’s Second Amendment claim because his status as mentally
18 defective, as defined by 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) and 27 C.F.R. § 478.11, allowed for
19 constitutionally permissible limits on his right to bear arms. *Id.*

20 Case law clearly indicates that the Ninth Circuit does not, as Plaintiff argues,
21 consider the language in *Heller* as merely “precautionary”. Dkt. # 6 at 6. Ninth Circuit
22 case law also indicates that Plaintiff’s arguments that section 922(g)(4) are
23 unconstitutional as applied to him also do not pass muster. Like the plaintiffs in *Phillips*
24 and *Petramala*, the crux of Plaintiff’s argument is that section 922(g)(4)
25 unconstitutionally deprives him of his right to keep and bear arms because he no longer
26 suffers from his “condition” and is presumably not a danger to the public. When
27 considering arguments regarding as-applied challenges to prohibitions included in *Heller*

1 as “presumptively legal”, the Ninth Circuit has consistently rejected arguments that the
2 constitutionality of a prohibition on possession turns on whether there is evidence that the
3 specific plaintiff is violent or non-violent. Thus, Plaintiff’s argument that the Court
4 should find that his involuntary commitment and alleged past mental health issues do not
5 provide a constitutional basis for a prohibition on his right to bear arms is unpersuasive.

6 Plaintiff also fails to plead sufficient facts to distinguish himself from those
7 historically barred from Second Amendment protections: the mentally ill. Plaintiff does
8 not dispute that he meets the definition of someone “committed to a mental institution”
9 under 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4). The term “committed to a mental institution” in 18 U.S.C.
10 § 922(g)(4) is defined by regulation as:

11 A formal commitment of a person to a mental institution by a court, board,
12 commission, or other lawful authority. The term includes a commitment to
13 a mental institution involuntarily. The term includes commitment for
14 mental defectiveness or mental illness. It also includes commitments for
other reasons, such as for drug use.

15 17 C.F.R. § 478.11. While Plaintiff provides very few details regarding his
16 commitment for mental health treatment, he does allege that he was involuntarily
17 committed by the King County Superior Court in October of 1999. Dkt. # 1 ¶ 3.1. While
18 Plaintiff does not specifically allege that he had a mental illness, he alleges that he had a
19 “condition” that led to the involuntary commitment, and that he at some point used
20 medication to control his condition. *Id.* ¶¶ 3.1, 3.8. Plaintiff does not provide the exact
21 date in October that he was committed, but he alleges that his commitment expired by
22 August 8, 2000. Thus, based on the facts alleged, Plaintiff was presumably committed
23 for close to a year. Although Plaintiff contends that he no longer has a “condition”, he
24 fails to allege facts sufficient to support that contention. In making that contention,
25 Plaintiff assumes that living a “socially-responsible, well-balanced, and accomplished
26 life” is an indication that he does not suffer from a mental illness or mental defect. That
27

1 assumption is a gross generalization that mischaracterizes what it means to live with a
2 mental illness and implies that the mentally ill cannot have a productive and fulfilling
3 life. *Id.* ¶¶ 3.3, 3.8. Plaintiff also alleges that he submitted medical and psychological
4 examinations to the King County Superior Court when he petitioned for restoration of his
5 firearm rights under RCW 9.41.047 and that the court granted his petition. *Id.* ¶ 3.9.
6 Again, Plaintiff fails to allege facts showing how the court’s grant of his petition
7 distinguishes him from the mentally ill. Washington State’s restoration statute,
8 RCW 9.41.047, requires a finding that the applicant “no longer presents a substantial
9 danger to himself or herself, or the public,” not a finding that the petitioner no longer
10 suffers from the condition related to the commitment. Therefore, Plaintiff fails to state a
11 claim that 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) violates the Second Amendment as it applies to him.

12 *b. Appropriate Level of Scrutiny*

13 Even if Plaintiff could show that challenged law burdens conduct protected by the
14 Second Amendment, Plaintiff’s claim fails under the second step of the two-pronged
15 analysis established by the Ninth Circuit. “The level of scrutiny in the Second
16 Amendment context should depend on the nature of the conduct being regulated and the
17 degree to which the challenged law burdens the right.” *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138. The
18 parties agree that the appropriate level of scrutiny for a regulation when Second
19 Amendment rights are at issue is intermediate scrutiny. To pass intermediate scrutiny,
20 Defendants must show: “(1) the government’s stated objective to be significant,
21 substantial, or important; and (2) a reasonable fit between the challenged regulation and
22 the asserted objective.” *Id.* at 1139. Plaintiff concedes that regulation of firearm
23 possession is a significant interest. However, Plaintiff argues that 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4)
24 does not pass the second element of the intermediate scrutiny standard.

25 According to both case law and the legislative history of the statute at issue, the
26 asserted objective of regulation of firearm possession includes preventing firearm
27 violence to promote public safety as well as suicide prevention. S. Rep. No. 89-1966

1 at 1; 114 Cong. Rec. 13,219 (statement of Sen. Tydings); 114 Cong. Rec. 21,829
2 (statement of Rep. Bingham). The Supreme Court has recognized that the Government’s
3 interest in suicide prevention is “unquestionably important and legitimate”. *Washington*
4 *v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702, 735 (1997). Thus, in analyzing the “fit” between section
5 922(g)(4) and regulation of firearm possession, the issue for this Court to analyze, is
6 whether prohibiting those who have been committed to a mental institution from bearing
7 arms is substantially related to these stated objectives. Defendants provide ample
8 evidence to support this connection.

9 First, Defendants argue that Congress relied on a history of involuntary
10 commitment or adjudicated mental illness as the basis for preventative firearm
11 prohibition when it enacted section 922(g)(4). *See* 114 Cong. Rec. 14,773 (1968) (Sen.
12 Long) (stating that mentally ill individuals, “by their actions, have demonstrated that they
13 are dangerous, or that they may become dangerous”).

14 Second, Defendants provide reference to numerous studies that indicate that those
15 with a history of mental illness bear a significant additional risk of gun violence than
16 those in the general population, both against others as well as against themselves. *See*
17 *e.g.* Seena Fazel & Martin Grann, *The Population Impact of Severe Mental Illness on*
18 *Violent Crime*, 163 *Am. J. Psychiatry* 1397, 1401 (Aug. 2006); Joseph R. Simpson, *Bad*
19 *Risk? An Overview of Laws Prohibiting Possession of Firearms by Individuals With a*
20 *History of Treatment for Mental Illness*, 35 *J. Am. Acad. Psychiatric Law* 330, 338
21 (2007); Richard A. Friedman, *Violence and Mental Illness – How Strong Is the Link?*,
22 355 *New Eng. J. Med.* 2064, 2065 (Nov. 2006); Richard Van Dorn et al., *Mental*
23 *Disorder and Violence: Is There a Relationship Beyond Substance Use?*, 47 *Soc.*
24 *Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology* 487 (Mar. 2012); Bryan L. Tanney, *Psychiatric*
25 *Diagnoses and Suicidal Acts*, in Ronald W. Maris et al., *Comprehensive Textbook of*
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1 *Suicidology* 339 (2000); Matthew Miller & David Hemenway, *Guns and Suicide in the*
2 *United States*, 359 *New England J. Med.* 989, 989-90 (Sept. 2008).

3 To pass the substantial relationship inquiry, Defendants need only show that the
4 “fit” between the asserted interest and the challenged law is reasonable, and that the
5 regulation at issue is substantially related to the Government’s interest in promoting
6 public safety and preventing suicide. *See Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1142; *see also United*
7 *States v. Chapman*, 666 F.3d 220, 231 (4th Cir. 2012). Defendants have more than
8 satisfied this element of the analysis.³ Plaintiff fails to show that 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4)
9 does not pass constitutional muster under intermediate scrutiny. Therefore, Defendants’
10 motion to dismiss Plaintiff’s Second Amendment claim is **GRANTED**.

11 **C. Fifth Amendment Claim**

12 Defendants argue that Plaintiff fails to state a claim for violation of his due process
13 rights because he does not allege any defect in his involuntary commitment proceeding.
14 Defendants further argue that if Plaintiff is claiming that the statute at issue, and not the
15 process under which he was deprived of his rights, deprived him of his right to bear and
16 keep arms without due process, such claims should be analyzed under the Second
17 Amendment. “[T]he right to keep and to bear arms for self-defense . . . is more
18 appropriately analyzed under the Second Amendment.” *Nordyke v. King*, 644 F.3d 776,
19 794 (9th Cir. 2011), on reh’g en banc, 681 F.3d 1041 (9th Cir. 2012); *see also Albright v.*
20 *Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 273, 114 S.Ct. 807, 127 L.Ed.2d 114 (1994) (“Where a particular
21 Amendment provides an explicit textual source of constitutional protection against a
22 particular sort of government behavior, that Amendment, not the more generalized notion
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24 ³ Although Plaintiff makes an as-applied challenge to section 922(g)(4), he makes no
25 argument as to whether the application of the statute to him is substantially related to the
26 Government’s stated interest. In the absence of any evidence that someone with Plaintiff’s
27 condition or in similar circumstances does not bear an additional risk of gun violence or suicide,
the Court concludes that the application of section 922(g)(4) to Plaintiff is substantially related to
the Government’s interest. *See Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1142.

1 of substantive due process, must be the guide for analyzing these claims.”). The Court
2 agrees. Further, Plaintiff does not offer any argument to the contrary. Defendants’
3 motion to dismiss Plaintiff’s Fifth Amendment claim is **GRANTED**.

4 **V. CONCLUSION**

5 For the foregoing reasons, the Court **GRANTS** Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss.
6 Dkt. # 4.

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8 Dated this 8th day of February, 2018.



The Honorable Richard A. Jones
United States District Judge

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FOR PUBLICATION

**UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT**

DUY T. MAI,
Plaintiff-Appellant,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA;
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
JUSTICE; BUREAU OF ALCOHOL,
TOBACCO, FIREARMS, AND
EXPLOSIVES; FEDERAL BUREAU
OF INVESTIGATION; WILLIAM P.
BARR, Attorney General;
CHRISTOPHER A. WRAY, as
Director of the Federal Bureau of
Investigation; REGINA
LOMBARDO, as Acting Director
of the Bureau of Alcohol,
Tobacco, Firearms, and
Explosives,
Defendants-Appellees.

No. 18-36071

D.C. No.
2:17-cv-00561-RAJ

OPINION

Appeal from the United States District Court
for the Western District of Washington
Richard A. Jones, District Judge, Presiding

Argued and Submitted December 11, 2019
Seattle, Washington

Filed March 11, 2020

Before: Susan P. Graber and Ronald M. Gould, Circuit
Judges, and David A. Ezra,* District Judge.

Opinion by Judge Graber

SUMMARY**

Civil Rights

The panel affirmed the district court's dismissal of a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint containing an as-applied Second Amendment challenge to 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4), which prohibits plaintiff from possessing firearms due to his involuntary commitment in 1999 to a mental institution for more than nine months after a Washington state court found plaintiff to be both mentally ill and dangerous.

Plaintiff argued that § 922(g)(4)'s continued application to him despite his alleged return to mental health and peaceableness violated the Second Amendment. The panel held that, assuming (without deciding) that § 922(g)(4)'s prohibition burdens Second Amendment rights, intermediate scrutiny applied. The panel also held that the prohibition on the possession of firearms by persons, like plaintiff, whom a

* The Honorable David A. Ezra, United States District Judge for the District of Hawaii, sitting by designation.

** This summary constitutes no part of the opinion of the court. It has been prepared by court staff for the convenience of the reader.

state court has found to be both mentally ill and dangerous is a reasonable fit with the government's indisputably important interest in preventing gun violence. Scientific evidence supported the congressional judgment that those who have been committed involuntarily to a mental institution still pose an increased risk of violence even years after their release from commitment. The panel therefore concluded that Section 922(g)(4)'s continued application to plaintiff did not violate the Second Amendment.

COUNSEL

Vitaliy Kertchen (argued), Tacoma, Washington, for Plaintiff-Appellant.

Abby C. Wright (argued) and Michael S. Raab, Appellate Staff; Brian T. Moran, United States Attorney; Joseph H. Hunt, Assistant Attorney General; Civil Division, United States Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; for Defendants-Appellees.

OPINION

GRABER, Circuit Judge:

Plaintiff Duy Mai recently sought to buy a firearm, but federal law barred him from doing so. A number of years ago, Plaintiff was committed involuntarily, for more than nine months, to a mental institution after a Washington state court found him to be both mentally ill and dangerous. Title 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) prohibits the possession of firearms by those, like Plaintiff, whom a state court committed

involuntarily to a mental institution. Plaintiff concedes that the statutory prohibition on his possession of firearms during the period of his commitment was constitutional under the Second Amendment. But Plaintiff here brings an as-applied challenge to § 922(g)(4), arguing that its *continued* application to him despite his alleged return to mental health and peaceableness violates the Second Amendment. We hold that, assuming (without deciding) that § 922(g)(4)'s prohibition burdens Second Amendment rights, intermediate scrutiny applies. We also hold that the prohibition on the possession of firearms by persons, like Plaintiff, whom a state court has found to be both mentally ill and dangerous is a reasonable fit with the government's indisputably important interest in preventing gun violence. Scientific evidence supports the congressional judgment that those who have been committed involuntarily to a mental institution still pose an increased risk of violence even years after their release from commitment. Section 922(g)(4)'s continued application to Plaintiff does not violate the Second Amendment. We therefore affirm the district court's dismissal of this action.

BACKGROUND¹

In October 1999, a Washington state court committed Plaintiff involuntarily for mental health treatment after he threatened himself and others. The state court determined that Plaintiff was *both* mentally ill *and* dangerous. Plaintiff's

¹ Because we are reviewing the dismissal of a complaint, we accept as true its well-pleaded factual allegations. *Nayab v. Capital One Bank (USA), N.A.*, 942 F.3d 480, 487 (9th Cir. 2019).

commitment lasted more than nine months,² ending in August 2000. Plaintiff was seventeen years old at the time of commitment, and his commitment spanned his eighteenth birthday.

Since his release from commitment in 2000, Plaintiff has earned a GED, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree. He is gainfully employed and a father to two children. According to the complaint, he no longer suffers from mental illness, and he lives "a socially-responsible, well-balanced, and accomplished life."

As a result of Plaintiff's involuntary commitment, Washington law prohibited him from possessing a firearm. Wash. Rev. Code § 9.41.040(2)(a)(iv). Washington law, though, allows persons to petition for relief from that prohibition if they meet certain conditions. *Id.* § 9.41.047(3)(a). In 2014, Plaintiff successfully petitioned a Washington state court for relief. The court found, pursuant to the requirements of Washington law, that "(1) [Plaintiff] is no longer required to participate in court-ordered inpatient or outpatient treatment; (2) [Plaintiff] has successfully managed the condition related to his commitment; (3) [Plaintiff] no longer presents a substantial danger to himself, or the public; and (4) [t]he symptoms related to the commitment are not reasonably likely to recur." *See id.* § 9.41.047(3)(c) (requiring those findings). Accordingly, the relevant state law no longer prohibits Plaintiff from possessing a firearm.

² The record strongly suggests that a state court committed Plaintiff involuntarily three separate times during the nine-month period in 1999 and 2000. The complaint is ambiguous on this point. Because the number of commitments does not alter the analysis, we assume that a state court committed Plaintiff involuntarily only once, for a period of nine months.

But, as a result of his involuntary commitment, *federal* law prohibits Plaintiff from possessing a firearm. Title 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) bars individuals who have been “committed to a mental institution” from possessing firearms.³ Federal regulations make clear that the prohibition does not apply to “a person in a mental institution for observation or a voluntary admission to a mental institution.” 27 C.F.R. § 478.11. Involuntary commitments comport with due process only when the individual is found to be *both* mentally ill *and* dangerous. *Foucha v. Louisiana*, 504 U.S. 71, 80 (1992). Additionally, commitments under state-law procedures that lack robust judicial involvement do not qualify as commitments for purposes of § 922(g)(4). *United States v. Rehlander*, 666 F.3d 45, 47–49 (1st Cir. 2012). We agree with the parties that Plaintiff’s involuntary commitment by the Washington state court—which found Plaintiff to be both mentally ill and dangerous—qualifies as a “commitment” for purposes of § 922(g)(4). Section 922(g)(4), then, bars Plaintiff from possessing a firearm.

Federal law provides two potential avenues for relief from the § 922(g)(4) bar but, as explained below, neither avenue is currently available to Plaintiff.

First, under 18 U.S.C. § 925(c), Plaintiff may apply to the United States Attorney General “for relief from the disabilities imposed by Federal laws with respect to the . . .

³ “It shall be unlawful for any person . . . who has been adjudicated as a mental defective or who has been committed to a mental institution . . . [to] possess in or affecting commerce, any firearm or ammunition; or to receive any firearm or ammunition which has been shipped or transported in interstate or foreign commerce.” 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4).

possession of firearms.”⁴ Beginning in 1986, that provision extended to persons who had been involuntarily committed to a mental institution. Firearms Owners’ Protection Act, Pub. L. 99-308, § 105, 100 Stat. 449 (1986). The Attorney General may, but is not required to, grant relief “if it is established to his satisfaction that the circumstances regarding the disability, and the applicant’s record and reputation, are such that the applicant will not be likely to act in a manner dangerous to public safety and that the granting of the relief would not be contrary to the public interest.” *Id.*; see *United States v. Bean*, 537 U.S. 71, 77 (2002) (noting the discretionary nature of the decision and observing that relief

⁴ Section 925(c) provides, in relevant part:

A person who is prohibited from possessing . . . firearms or ammunition may make application to the Attorney General for relief from the disabilities imposed by Federal laws with respect to the . . . possession of firearms, and the Attorney General may grant such relief if it is established to his satisfaction that the circumstances regarding the disability, and the applicant’s record and reputation, are such that the applicant will not be likely to act in a manner dangerous to public safety and that the granting of the relief would not be contrary to the public interest. Any person whose application for relief from disabilities is denied by the Attorney General may file a petition with the United States district court for the district in which he resides for a judicial review of such denial. The court may in its discretion admit additional evidence where failure to do so would result in a miscarriage of justice. . . . Whenever the Attorney General grants relief to any person pursuant to this section he shall promptly publish in the Federal Register notice of such action, together with the reasons therefor.

may be denied “even when the statutory prerequisites are satisfied”).

That statutory option, however, is currently foreclosed to Plaintiff and all others. Since 1992, Congress has prohibited the use of funds “to investigate or act upon applications for relief from Federal firearms disabilities under 18 U.S.C. [§ 925(c).” *Bean*, 537 U.S. at 74–75 (alteration in original) (quoting Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriations Act, 1993, Pub. L. No. 102-393, 106 Stat. 1729, 1732 (1992)); *see also id.* at 75 n.3 (citing later appropriations acts with the same prohibition); *Hatfield v. Barr*, 925 F.3d 950, 952 (7th Cir. 2019) (“[S]ince 1992 Congress has withheld funds to implement § 925(c).”). Congress defunded the program because, among other reasons, determining eligibility had proved to be a “very difficult and subjective task which could have devastating consequences for innocent citizens if the wrong decision is made.” S. Rep. No. 102-353, at 19 (1992). Accordingly, unless Congress chooses in the future to fund the federal program, any application by Plaintiff for relief pursuant to § 925(c) would be futile. *See Bean*, 537 U.S. at 76 (holding that, while funding is withheld, judicial review is also unavailable).

Plaintiff’s second potential avenue for relief is through a state program that qualifies under 34 U.S.C. § 40915. To qualify, the state’s program must “permit[] a person who, pursuant to State law, . . . has been committed to a mental institution, to apply to the State for relief from the disabilities imposed by” 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) and other laws. *Id.* § 40915(a)(1). The program also must provide

that a State court, board, commission, or other lawful authority shall grant the relief, pursuant to State law and in accordance with the principles of due process, if the circumstances regarding the disabilities . . . , and the person’s record and reputation, are such that the person will not be likely to act in a manner dangerous to public safety and that the granting of the relief would not be contrary to the public interest.

Id. § 40915(a)(2). Finally, the program must allow a person to petition the state court “for a de novo judicial review of [a] denial.” *Id.* § 40915(a)(3). For a person granted relief under a qualifying state program, § 922(g)(4)’s prohibition on the possession of firearms does not apply. *Id.* § 40915(b).

According to the government, “approximately thirty States” have created qualifying programs. *See also* Bureau of Justice Statistics, *State Profiles: NICS Act Record Improvement Program (NARIP) Awards FY 2009–2018*, <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=491> (providing state-by-state information suggesting that thirty states and one tribe have qualifying programs). As noted above, Washington law provides a mechanism for persons to petition for relief from the state-law prohibition on the possession of firearms. But that mechanism does not qualify under § 40915 because, among other reasons, the factual findings required by Washington law differ from the factual findings required by § 40915. Washington law requires a finding that the person “no longer presents a *substantial danger* to himself or herself, or the public.” Wash. Rev. Code § 9.41.047(3)(c)(iii) (emphasis added). By contrast, the federal standard requires a determination that “the person will not be likely to act in a

manner *dangerous* to public safety.” 34 U.S.C. § 40915(a)(2) (emphasis added). Additionally, § 40915(a)(2) requires a finding that granting “relief would not be contrary to the public interest,” while Washington law requires no such inquiry. In other words, the federal standard is more stringent than the Washington standard. Accordingly, unless Washington chooses in the future to create a program that meets the requirements of § 40915, Plaintiff has no avenue for relief from § 922(g)(4)’s prohibition.

Plaintiff filed this action in 2017 after he was denied the purchase of a firearm because of § 922(g)(4). He alleges that the Department of Justice; the United States Attorney General; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (collectively, “the government”) violated his Second Amendment right to bear arms and his Fifth Amendment right to due process by prohibiting him from possessing firearms.

The government moved to dismiss the complaint for failure to state a claim. The district court granted that motion, holding that § 922(g)(4) is categorically constitutional under the Second Amendment and, alternatively, that § 922(g)(4) satisfies intermediate scrutiny. The court also rejected Plaintiff’s due process claim. Plaintiff then sought leave to amend the complaint, which the court denied as futile. Plaintiff timely appeals.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

We review *de novo* a district court’s decision to grant a motion to dismiss, *Nayab*, 942 F.3d at 487, as well as a challenge to the constitutionality of statutes, *United States v. Torres*, 911 F.3d 1253, 1257 (9th Cir. 2019). “When a

district court determines that further amendment would be futile, we will affirm the district court’s dismissal on this basis if it is clear, upon de novo review, that the complaint could not be saved by any amendment.” *Curry v. Yelp Inc.*, 875 F.3d 1219, 1228 (9th Cir. 2017) (internal quotation marks omitted).

DISCUSSION

As this case reaches us, Plaintiff advances only his Second Amendment claim. He argues that the Second Amendment requires that he be allowed to possess firearms notwithstanding his earlier involuntary commitment. He does not specify the standard by which federal courts should measure whether persons, like Plaintiff, are sufficiently rehabilitated for purposes of the Second Amendment. Notably, though, Plaintiff does not seek the application of the substantive standards defined in 34 U.S.C. § 40915. He has never asserted, for example, an equal-protection claim that, because persons in thirty other states benefit from programs applying § 40915’s substantive standards, he too is entitled to relief or to an opportunity to meet those standards. Nor has he advanced, on appeal, an argument that due process demands the same results. *See Smith v. Marsh*, 194 F.3d 1045, 1052 (9th Cir. 1999) (holding that arguments not raised in the opening brief are forfeited). We therefore do not consider whether those theories have merit, and we turn to the only claim on appeal: whether the Second Amendment requires that Plaintiff be allowed to possess firearms.

The “Second Amendment protects the right to keep and bear arms for the purpose of self-defense.” *McDonald v. City of Chicago*, 561 U.S. 742, 749–50 (2010). But the right is “not unlimited.” *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S.

570, 595 (2008). The Supreme Court clarified that its recognition of the Second Amendment right does not “cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms.” *Id.* at 626–27; *accord McDonald*, 561 U.S. at 786. Those prohibitions are “presumptively lawful.” *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 627 n.26.

Applying the lessons from *Heller* and *McDonald*, we have adopted a two-step inquiry for assessing whether a law violates the Second Amendment. *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1258. “This test ‘(1) asks whether the challenged law burdens conduct protected by the Second Amendment and (2) if so, directs courts to apply an appropriate level of scrutiny.’” *Id.* (quoting *United States v. Chovan*, 735 F.3d 1127, 1136 (9th Cir. 2013)).

Whether § 922(g)(4)’s prohibition on the possession of firearms by persons who have been committed to a mental institution comports with the Second Amendment is an issue of first impression in this circuit. But we are guided by our previous decisions in related contexts. *See, e.g., id.* at 1264 (holding that § 922(g)(5)’s prohibition on the possession of firearms by unlawful aliens survives intermediate scrutiny); *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1142 (holding that § 922(g)(9)’s prohibition on the possession of firearms by persons previously convicted of a domestic violence misdemeanor survives intermediate scrutiny); *United States v. Vongxay*, 594 F.3d 1111, 1118 (9th Cir. 2010) (holding that § 922(g)(1)’s prohibition on the possession of firearms by felons comports with the Second Amendment).

Decisions by the Third and Sixth Circuits addressing § 922(g)(4) also inform our analysis. Those courts have addressed challenges remarkably similar to Plaintiff's challenge here and have reached opposite conclusions. In both *Beers v. Attorney General*, 927 F.3d 150, 152 (3d Cir. 2019), *petition for cert. filed*, __ U.S.L.W. __ (U.S. Jan. 9, 2020) (No. 19-864), and *Tyler v. Hillsdale County Sheriff's Department*, 837 F.3d 678, 683–84 (6th Cir. 2016) (en banc), a state court had committed the plaintiff many years ago to a mental institution but, according to the plaintiff, he was now free of mental illness. In both cases, the plaintiff argued that, as applied to him, § 922(g)(4)'s prohibition violated the Second Amendment.

The Third Circuit rejected the claim, concluding that § 922(g)(4) did not burden conduct protected by the Second Amendment. *Beers*, 927 F.3d at 159. Accordingly, the plaintiff's alleged return to mental health was irrelevant to the constitutional analysis. *Id.*

By contrast, the Sixth Circuit reversed the district court's dismissal of the claim and remanded for further proceedings. *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 699. The court first concluded that § 922(g)(4) burdened Second Amendment rights and that intermediate scrutiny applied. *Id.* at 688–93. The court then held that § 922(g)(4) did not survive intermediate scrutiny as applied to the plaintiff because the government had failed to show that a *lifetime* prohibition on the possession of firearms was a reasonable fit with the goals of reducing crime and suicide. *Id.* at 693–99.

We turn, then, to our own analysis.

A. *Asking Whether § 922(g)(4) Burdens Second Amendment Rights*

We first ask whether the statute at issue “burdens conduct protected by the Second Amendment.” *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1258 (quoting *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1136). This inquiry “requires us to explore the amendment’s reach based on a historical understanding of the scope of the Second Amendment right.” *Id.* (internal quotation marks and brackets omitted). A law does not burden Second Amendment rights “if it either falls within one of the ‘presumptively lawful regulatory measures’ identified in *Heller* or regulates conduct that historically has fallen outside the scope of the Second Amendment.” *Id.* (some internal quotation marks omitted).

The government has presented a strong argument that both of those inquiries support the conclusion that § 922(g)(4) does not burden Second Amendment rights. The Supreme Court identified as presumptively lawful the “longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill.” *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 626. In *Vongxay*, 594 F.3d at 1114–15, we held that § 922(g)(1)—the federal prohibition on the possession of firearms by felons—fell within *Heller*’s “presumptively lawful” category. Like the federal prohibition as to felons, § 922(g)(4) had been on the books for decades when the Court decided *Heller*. Similarly, historical evidence supports the view that society did not entrust the mentally ill with the responsibility of bearing arms. *See, e.g., Beers*, 927 F.3d at 157–58 (summarizing the historical evidence).

Plaintiff responds by re-framing the inquiry. He concedes that a prohibition as to those persons who are *presently* mentally ill and dangerous does not implicate the Second

Amendment. But he reads both *Heller* and the historical evidence as limited to that circumscribed category: those who are presently mentally ill. He urges us to agree with the Sixth Circuit that “historical evidence . . . does not directly support the proposition that persons who were once committed due to mental illness are forever ineligible” to possess a firearm. *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 689.

We need not decide which perspective better comports with the historical evidence. Instead, we follow the “well-trodden and ‘judicious course’” taken by our court in many recent cases. *Pena v. Lindley*, 898 F.3d 969, 976 (9th Cir. 2018) (quoting *Woollard v. Gallagher*, 712 F.3d 865, 876 (4th Cir. 2013)), *petition for cert. filed*, __ U.S.L.W. __ (U.S. Dec. 28, 2018) (No. 18-843). We assume, without deciding, that § 922(g)(4), as applied to Plaintiff, burdens Second Amendment rights.

B. *Determining the Appropriate Level of Scrutiny*

We next “determine the appropriate level of scrutiny to apply.” *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1262. “[L]aws burdening Second Amendment rights must withstand more searching scrutiny than rational basis review.” *Id.* The precise level of heightened scrutiny depends “on (1) how close the law comes to the core of the Second Amendment right and (2) the severity of the law’s burden on the right.” *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138 (internal quotation marks omitted). “[T]here has been near unanimity in the post-*Heller* case law that, when considering regulations that fall within the scope of the Second Amendment, intermediate scrutiny is appropriate.” *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1262 (internal quotation marks omitted). Strict scrutiny applies only to laws that both implicate a core

Second Amendment right and place a substantial burden on that right. *Id.*

As Plaintiff recognizes, intermediate scrutiny applies here. “[T]he core of the Second Amendment is ‘the right of law-abiding, responsible citizens to use arms in defense of hearth and home.’” *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138 (quoting *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 635). In *Chovan*, we concluded that, regardless of present-day rectitude, a person convicted long ago of a domestic-violence misdemeanor was not a “law-abiding, responsible citizen.” *Id.* That same logic extends here: Regardless of present-day peaceableness, a person who required formal intervention and involuntary commitment by the State because of the person’s dangerousness is not a “law-abiding, responsible citizen.” Section 922(g)(4)’s prohibition thus falls well outside the core of the Second Amendment right. *Id.*

We recognize that the burden that § 922(g)(4)’s prohibition places on Plaintiff is “quite substantial.” *Id.* Unless Congress or the Washington legislature enacts a program relieving him from § 922(g)(4)’s prohibition, the law “amounts to a ‘total prohibition’ on firearm possession for [Plaintiff]—in fact, a ‘lifetime ban.’” *Id.* But we agree with the Sixth Circuit that, “[l]ike the other provisions of § 922(g), § 922(g)(4) does not burden the public at large; it burdens only a narrow class of individuals who are not at the core of the Second Amendment—those . . . previously involuntarily committed.” *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 691. Just as intermediate scrutiny applies to the other lifetime bans in § 922(g), so too does intermediate scrutiny apply to § 922(g)(4)’s prohibition. *See, e.g., Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138 (applying intermediate scrutiny to § 922(g)(9)’s prohibition on the possession of firearms by those previously convicted of the misdemeanor

of domestic violence); *see also Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 691–92 (collecting cases from other circuits that have applied intermediate scrutiny to lifetime bans imposed by § 922(g)).

In conclusion, we join the Sixth Circuit—the only other circuit court to have addressed the issue—in holding that intermediate scrutiny applies here. *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 690–92.

C. *Applying Intermediate Scrutiny*

To satisfy intermediate scrutiny, the government’s statutory objective must be “significant, substantial, or important,” and there must be a “reasonable fit” between the challenged law and that objective. *Silvester v. Harris*, 843 F.3d 816, 821–22 (9th Cir. 2016) (internal quotation marks omitted). “A statute need not utilize the least restrictive means of achieving its interest in order to withstand intermediate scrutiny.” *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1263 (internal quotation marks omitted). “Instead, the statute simply needs to promote a substantial government interest that would be achieved less effectively absent the regulation.” *Id.* (brackets and internal quotation marks omitted).

Here, two important interests support § 922(g)(4)’s ban on the possession of firearms by those who were involuntarily committed to a mental institution: preventing crime and preventing suicide. *See Washington v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702, 730–35 (1997) (recognizing the government’s “unquestionably important” interest in preventing suicide); *Schall v. Martin*, 467 U.S. 253, 264 (1984) (“The legitimate and compelling state interest in protecting the community from crime cannot be doubted.” (internal quotation marks omitted)); *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1263 (holding that the

government’s interests in crime control and public safety are “important”). We agree with the Sixth Circuit that those two interests “are not only legitimate, they are compelling.”⁵ *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 693.

Congress’ reasoning is straightforward. Firearms undoubtedly exacerbate acts of violence to others. *Bonidy v. U.S. Postal Serv.*, 790 F.3d 1121, 1126 (10th Cir. 2015). Firearms also greatly increase the risk of death by suicide. *See, e.g.*, Matthew Miller & David Hemenway, *Guns and Suicide in the United States*, 359 *New Eng. J. Med.* 989, 990 (2008) (“A suicide attempt with a firearm rarely affords a second chance. Attempts involving drugs or cutting, which account for more than 90% of all suicidal acts, prove fatal far less often.”); *id.* at 991 (discrediting as “invalid” the specious belief that “anyone who is serious enough about suicide to use a gun would find an equally effective means if a gun were not available”); *id.* (concluding that “the availability of lethal means . . . can make the difference between life and death”).

In enacting § 922(g)(4) and related restrictions, “Congress sought to . . . keep guns out of the hands of those who have demonstrated that they may not be trusted to possess a firearm without becoming a threat to society.” *Dickerson v. New Banner Inst., Inc.*, 460 U.S. 103, 112 (1983) (quoting *Lewis v. United States*, 445 U.S. 55, 63 (1980)), *superseded in other part by statute, as stated in Logan v. United States*, 552 U.S. 23, 27–28 (2007); *accord Small v. United States*, 544 U.S. 385, 393 (2005); *Lewis v. United States*, 445 U.S.

⁵ Because we determine that § 922(g)(4) is a reasonable fit for the government’s interest in preventing suicide, we need not and do not address whether the statute is also a reasonable fit for the government’s interest in preventing crime.

55, 63 (1980); *Scarborough v. United States*, 431 U.S. 563, 572 (1977). Put more succinctly, “Congress’ intent in enacting [§] 922(g) and [related laws] was to keep firearms out of the hands of presumptively risky people.” *Dickerson*, 460 U.S. at 112 n.6. Accordingly, although § 922(g)(4)’s prohibition takes effect as a result of a *past* event, the statute “target[s] a *present* danger, i.e., the danger posed by [those who previously have been involuntarily committed to a mental institution] who bear arms.” *Vartelas v. Holder*, 566 U.S. 257, 271 (2012) (emphasis added).

The Second Amendment allows categorical bans on groups of persons who presently pose an increased risk of violence. *See, e.g., United States v. Skoien*, 614 F.3d 638, 641 (7th Cir. 2010) (en banc) (“[S]ome categorical disqualifications are permissible: Congress is not limited to case-by-case exclusions of persons who have been shown to be untrustworthy with weapons . . .”). For example, we upheld the constitutionality of § 922(g)(9)’s ban on the possession of firearms by domestic violence misdemeanants because that category of persons has a high rate of domestic violence recidivism and because the use of firearms by domestic abusers causes more deaths. *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1140–41. And we upheld the constitutionality of § 922(g)(5)’s ban on the possession of firearms by unlawful aliens because that category of persons has “an inherent incentive to . . . evade law enforcement” and, if armed, “could pose a threat to immigration officers or other law enforcement.” *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1264.

Similarly, in enacting § 922(g)(4), Congress determined that, like felons and domestic-violence assailants, those who have been involuntarily committed to a mental institution also pose an increased risk of violence. As we explain below,

scientific evidence amply supports that congressional judgment. Section 922(g)(4)'s prohibition is therefore a reasonable fit for the government's laudable goal of preventing gun violence.

Plaintiff does not challenge that conclusion as a general matter. Indeed, he concedes that § 922(g)(4)'s prohibition justifiably applied to him originally. Instead, Plaintiff brings an as-applied challenge only. He argues that the *continued* application of the prohibition to him is *no longer* justified because of the passage of time and his alleged mental health and peaceableness in recent years. For the reasons that follow, we disagree.

1. *Scientific Evidence Reasonably Supports Congress' Judgment.*

The scientific evidence cited by the government shows an increased risk of violence for those who have been released from involuntary commitment. For example, the authors of one meta-analysis surveyed the available scientific literature that studied the relationship between a history of mental illness and the risk of suicide. E. Clare Harris & Brian Barraclough, *Suicide as an Outcome for Mental Disorders: A Meta-Analysis*, 170 *Brit. J. Psychiatry* 205 (1997) [hereinafter *Suicide Meta-Analysis*]. The authors found that studies of persons released from involuntary commitment reported a combined "suicide risk 39 times that expected."⁶ *Id.* at 220 (emphasis added). That extraordinarily increased risk of

⁶ The authors defined the "expected" rate of suicide as either the rate calculated by the authors of the individual study or the background rate for the general population of the relevant country, controlling for years of the study, age, and gender. *Suicide Meta-Analysis, supra*, at 205.

suicide clearly justifies the congressional judgment that those released from involuntary commitment pose an increased risk of suicide.

Plaintiff correctly points out that the scientific evidence is not a perfect match for his circumstances. For example, although suicide risk following release from commitment is extremely high, the risk “seems highest” initially and “diminishes thereafter.” *Id.* at 223. Furthermore, the studies followed the outcomes of those released from involuntary commitment for up to 8.5 years, whereas Plaintiff was released from involuntary commitment two decades ago. Channeling the Sixth Circuit’s analysis, Plaintiff urges us to conclude that the government’s cited studies are insufficient to support the congressional judgment that he poses an increased risk of suicide. *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 695–96.

We disagree. In assessing congressional judgment, “we do not impose an ‘unnecessarily rigid burden of proof,’ and we allow [the government] to rely on any material ‘reasonably believed to be relevant’ to substantiate its interests.” *Pena*, 898 F.3d at 979 (quoting *Mahoney v. Sessions*, 871 F.3d 873, 881 (9th Cir. 2017)). That standard applies because “we are weighing a legislative judgment, not evidence in a criminal trial.” *Id.* Thus, we do not require “scientific precision.” *Id.* at 984. We ask only whether the evidence “fairly supports” Congress’ “reasonable” conclusions. *Id.* at 979–80 (quoting *Jackson v. City of San Francisco*, 746 F.3d 953, 969 (9th Cir. 2014)); *see also Jackson*, 746 F.3d at 969 (holding that, even if the relevant science were “an open question,” that conclusion “is insufficient to discredit [a legislative body’s] reasonable conclusions”). When empirical evidence is incomplete, we “must accord substantial deference to the predictive

judgments of Congress.” *Turner Broad. Sys., Inc. v. FCC*, 512 U.S. 622, 665 (1994). “Sound policymaking often requires legislators to forecast future events and to anticipate the likely impact of these events based on deductions and inferences for which complete empirical support may be unavailable.” *Id.*

Scientific studies show an ever-present increased risk of violence for those who were committed involuntarily, even well after they are released. We cannot conclude that, because no one apparently has published a study beyond 8.5 years after the participants’ release from involuntary commitment, Congress may not infer that the increased risk of violence continues after that time period. Importantly, the studies did not show merely a slight increase in risk for those involuntarily committed; the studies reported “a suicide risk 39 times that expected.” *Suicide Meta-Analysis, supra*, at 220 (emphasis added). It was well within Congress’ legislative discretion to predict that the increased risk would not plummet to *zero* in later years.

Closely related studies confirm that suicide risk remains extremely high for those with a history of mental illness, even when studies continue beyond a decade after treatment. “Previously hospitalised patients” were studied for “up to 15 years after discharge from in-patient treatment,” and they had “a suicide risk seven times that expected.” *Id.* at 221. “Community care patients” were studied for up to 12 years, and they had a “suicide risk almost 13 times that expected.” *Id.* “Out-patients” were studied for up to 12 years, and they had “a suicide risk 18 times that expected.” *Id.* Studies that did not differentiate between the types of treatment that patients received were conducted for up to 15 years and reported “a suicide risk 11 times that expected.” *Id.*

In sum, although the scientific evidence suggests that Plaintiff's increased risk of suicide decreases over time, nothing suggests that it ever dissipates entirely.⁷ Scientific evidence thus fairly supports the congressional judgment that those who have been involuntarily committed to a mental institution continue to pose an increased risk of violence even many years after their release from commitment. *See Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1142 (rejecting an as-applied challenge to § 922(g)(9)'s prohibition on a domestic violence misdemeanor because he had not "directly proved that if a domestic abuser has not committed domestic violence for fifteen years, that abuser is highly unlikely to do so again").

Plaintiff has asserted that, because *he* was released from commitment years ago, no longer suffers from mental illness, and has been peaceable in recent years, the Second Amendment requires that he be allowed to possess firearms. But we emphasize that we are assessing congressional judgment about a category of persons, not about Plaintiff himself. As described above, scientific evidence reasonably supports the congressional judgment about that category of persons. We agree with the Sixth Circuit that the Second Amendment does not demand "an individualized hearing" to assess Plaintiff's own personal level of risk. *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 698 n.18; *see also Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1264 n.6 (holding

⁷ In other contexts, scientific consensus exists that, over time, a particular increased risk dissolves entirely. For example, the American Cancer Society reports that, fifteen years after quitting smoking, a former smoker's "risk of coronary heart disease is that of a non-smoker's." Am. Cancer Soc'y, *Benefits of Quitting Smoking Over Time*, <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/benefits-of-quitting-smoking-over-time.html>. We have located nothing similar in the present context.

that, under intermediate scrutiny, some amount of over-inclusiveness for a firearms prohibition is permissible).

But even if we were to consider his personal situation, Plaintiff's own anecdotal evidence of his psychological evaluations in 2014 confirms what the scientific literature explains: Although his present level of risk is lower than it was around the time of his commitment, his history of mental illness remains a scientifically recognized factor in evaluating his current level of risk. One of Plaintiff's doctors wrote that a history of mental illness is "associated with higher risk of aggression." Plaintiff's results on one psychological test showed less of a risk than "the base rate for individuals with a psychiatric history"; one doctor concluded that he has a "low risk for future violence"; and another doctor concluded that he does not "represent[] a significant suicide risk." But nothing in the record suggests that Plaintiff's level of risk is nonexistent or that his level of risk matches the risk associated with a similarly situated person who lacks a history of mental illness.

2. *Congress Has Not Reconsidered Its Judgment.*

Congress' 2008 enactment of 34 U.S.C. § 40915 does not affect our analysis. As described above, § 40915 allows states to create their own "relief from disabilities" programs. The Sixth Circuit held that § 40915 "is a clear indication that Congress does not believe that previously committed persons are sufficiently dangerous as a class" to prohibit them from possessing firearms. *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 697. We understand Congress' enactment of § 40915 differently.

Congress enacted § 40915 as part of the NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007 ("NIAA"), 34 U.S.C.

§§ 40902–40941. As its name suggests, the NIAA aimed to improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (“NICS”), the federal background-check system that includes a database listing persons who have been disqualified from possessing firearms. *Id.* § 40902. Congress passed the NIAA in response to horrible acts of gun violence by those with a history of mental illness. *Id.* § 40902(8)–(9). All of the NIAA’s substantive provisions other than § 40915 seek to improve the information contained in the federal database. *See, e.g., id.* § 40911 (requiring federal agencies to share information); *id.* §§ 40912–40914 (encouraging states to share information).

The NIAA was a political compromise that included § 40915’s avenue for relief for some of the least dangerous only in exchange for greatly improved enforcement as to all the rest, including the most dangerous.⁸ Congress’ statutory extension of grace to some persons as part of a political compromise aimed at preventing gun violence does not affect our constitutional analysis. We do not read the NIAA as disturbing the longstanding congressional judgment—supported by scientific evidence—that those who were

⁸ *See, e.g.,* 153 Cong. Rec. 15,676 (2007) (“In order to move the legislation to the floor, it was necessary to make some accommodations [including the addition of § 40915] to incorporate the concerns of gun owners.” (statement of Rep. Conyers)); *id.* at 15,677 (“This legislation represents a true compromise . . . [with] two diverse groups . . . , the NRA and the Brady Group, coming together to help work out this legislation, and both had some benefits from it.” (statement of Rep. Castle)); *accord* 153 Cong. Rec. 36,338 (2007) (“[T]his compromise legislation . . . respects the rights of gun owners and, at the same time, makes sure that the NICS system will work more effectively.” (statement of Sen. Leahy)).

involuntarily committed to a mental institution pose an increased risk of violence even years after their release.⁹

3. *Section 922(g)(4) Is a Reasonable Fit for Preventing Suicide.*

To meet intermediate scrutiny, the government must demonstrate that § 922(g)(4) is a “reasonable fit” for the goal of reducing gun violence. *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1263. As described above, Congress reasonably concluded that restricting firearms from persons with an increased risk of violence advances the goal of reducing gun violence. Section 922(g)(4) thus appears to be a “reasonable fit” for the government’s important interest. *See id.* (holding that, to meet intermediate scrutiny, a “statute simply needs to promote a substantial government interest that would be achieved less effectively absent the regulation.” (brackets and internal quotation marks omitted)).

But we also must consider the availability, or unavailability, of avenues of relief from categorical, lifetime bans. *Fisher v. Kealoha*, 855 F.3d 1067, 1071 (9th Cir. 2017) (per curiam); *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1142. Plaintiff presently

⁹ Nor could Congress’ extension of grace to some persons alter the meaning of the Second Amendment. Like many constitutional provisions, the Second Amendment establishes a floor below which Congress may not legislate. But if Congress chooses to legislate well above that floor—for example, by allowing categories of persons to possess firearms even though Congress could restrict possession—that legislation has no effect on the meaning of the Second Amendment. *See, e.g., Bracy v. Gramley*, 520 U.S. 899, 904 (1997) (holding that “the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment establishes a constitutional floor, not a uniform standard” and noting the existence of many laws that legislate above that constitutional minimum).

has no avenue for seeking relief from § 922(g)(4)'s prohibition. Unless Congress funds the “relief from disabilities” program defined in § 925(c) or the Washington legislature creates a “relief from disabilities” program pursuant to § 40915,¹⁰ federal law prohibits Plaintiff from possessing a firearm. This case thus differs from challenges to other lifetime bans imposed by § 922(g), because those provisions allow persons to seek relief from the lifetime ban in certain circumstances. *See, e.g., Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1142 (noting the avenues for relief, such as a gubernatorial pardon, available to domestic-violence misdemeanants).

Several factors lead us to conclude that § 922(g)(4) nevertheless remains a reasonable fit for the congressional goal of reducing gun violence. First, the governmental interest at stake is compelling. The statute does not merely aim to protect financial interests. Nor is the statute merely a modest, incremental improvement in fighting crime. *See, e.g., Pena*, 898 F.3d at 981–86 (upholding the constitutionality of a law requiring some firearms to “microstamp” identifying information onto discharged bullets). The interest at stake here is preventing horrific acts of violence. Suicide affects not only its immediate victim; family members, friends, and the community as a whole suffer immensely. Even a small decrease in the number of suicides is, therefore, a significant public benefit.

¹⁰ That possibility is not fanciful. Soon after the Third Circuit rejected the plaintiff's challenge to § 922(g)(4) in *Beers*, 927 F.3d 150, the federal government approved Pennsylvania's state program under § 40915. Petition for cert. 23 (U.S. Jan. 9, 2020) (No. 19-864). The plaintiff in *Beers* is “now licensed to possess a firearm and has obtained one.” *Id.*

Second, as discussed above, the scientific evidence strongly suggests that the increased risk is not tiny. The available studies, though an imperfect match for Plaintiff's precise circumstances, have found that those released from involuntary commitment are 39 times more likely to commit suicide than those not previously committed.

Finally, § 922(g)(4)'s prohibition as to those who were committed involuntarily applies not to persons who *theoretically* might be dangerous at some point in their lives. Instead, it applies only to those who were found, through procedures satisfying due process, *actually* dangerous in the past.¹¹ By limiting the prohibition to those with a demonstrated history of dangerousness, § 922(g)(4) is more narrowly tailored than other lifetime prohibitions that we have upheld, such as § 922(g)(1)'s prohibition as to felons, both violent and non-violent. *See United States v. Phillips*, 827 F.3d 1171, 1175–76 (9th Cir. 2016) (upholding § 922(g)(1)'s lifetime ban as applied to someone convicted of the “non-violent” felony of misprision).

In sum, we hold that § 922(g)(4)'s prohibition on those who have been involuntarily committed to a mental institution is a reasonable fit for the important goal of reducing gun violence. The district court therefore correctly granted the government's motion to dismiss. Because the factual allegations in the proposed amended complaint do not affect our analysis, the district court correctly denied, as futile, Plaintiff's motion for leave to amend the complaint.

¹¹ As applied to Plaintiff, a state court found him dangerous at least once, and possibly three times. *See supra*, note 2.

CONCLUSION

The federal prohibition on Plaintiff’s possession of firearms because of his past involuntary commitment withstands Second Amendment scrutiny. Those who are no longer mentally ill, but who were committed involuntarily years ago, unquestionably pose less of a risk of violence now than when a state court found them to be mentally ill and dangerous. But scientific evidence reasonably supports the congressional judgment that they nevertheless still pose an increased risk of violence. The Second Amendment allows Congress to further its goal of preventing gun violence by barring Plaintiff from possessing a firearm.

We emphasize that we reach only Plaintiff’s Second Amendment challenge and that our holding is limited to § 922(g)(4)’s prohibition on those who have “been committed to a mental institution.” We emphatically do not subscribe to the notion that “once mentally ill, always so.” We accept, as we must and as we have no reason to doubt, that Plaintiff is no longer mentally ill. We decide only that § 922(g)(4)’s application to him withstands Second Amendment scrutiny.

AFFIRMED.

FOR PUBLICATION

**UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT**

DUY T. MAI,

Plaintiff-Appellant,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA;
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
JUSTICE; BUREAU OF ALCOHOL,
TOBACCO, FIREARMS, AND
EXPLOSIVES; FEDERAL BUREAU OF
INVESTIGATION; WILLIAM P. BARR,
Attorney General; CHRISTOPHER A.
WRAY, as Director of the Federal
Bureau of Investigation; REGINA
LOMBARDO, as Acting Director of
the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,
Firearms, and Explosives,
Defendants-Appellees.

No. 18-36071

D.C. No.
2:17-cv-00561-
RAJ

ORDER

Filed September 10, 2020

Before: Susan P. Graber and Ronald M. Gould, Circuit
Judges, and David A. Ezra,* District Judge.

* The Honorable David A. Ezra, United States District Judge for the
District of Hawaii, sitting by designation.

Order;
Dissent by Judge Collins;
Dissent by Judge Bumatay;
Dissent by Judge VanDyke

SUMMARY**

Second Amendment

The panel denied a petition for panel rehearing and denied on behalf of the court a petition for rehearing en banc. In the underlying appeal, the panel affirmed the district court's dismissal of a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint containing an as-applied Second Amendment challenge to 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4), which prohibits plaintiff from possessing firearms due to his involuntary commitment in 1999 to a mental institution for more than nine months after a Washington state court found plaintiff to be both mentally ill and dangerous. The panel concluded that Section 922(g)(4)'s continued application to plaintiff did not violate the Second Amendment.

Dissenting from the denial of rehearing en banc, Judge Collins stated that the panel's application of intermediate scrutiny here was seriously flawed and created a direct split with the Sixth Circuit. That alone was enough to warrant en banc review, and Judge Collins therefore joined Part IV.B of Judge Bumatay's dissent from the denial of rehearing en banc. Moreover, Judge Collins stated that he had substantial doubt that the framework of rules that the court uses to

** This summary constitutes no part of the opinion of the court. It has been prepared by court staff for the convenience of the reader.

analyze Second Amendment claims properly construes the controlling principles set forth in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570 (2008).

Dissenting from the denial of rehearing en banc, Judge Bumatay, joined by Judges VanDyke, and with whom judges Ikuta, Bade, and Hunsaker join as to Part IV, and with whom Judges Bennett, Collins, and Bress join as to Part IV.B, stated that the panel’s opinion justified the disturbing deprivation of a fundamental right by ignoring the history and tradition of the Second Amendment and applying ill-suited, foreign statistical studies that had no bearing on plaintiff’s circumstances. The proper inquiry would have recognized that the lifetime ban imposed by § 922(g)(4) on plaintiff is unequivocally a complete deprivation of his core right to home gun ownership, and therefore that the law was unconstitutional. Judge Bumatay stated that the panel incorrectly identified intermediate scrutiny as the proper standard of review and then flubbed its application. By failing to correct these errors, the Court undermined its Second Amendment jurisprudence and gave an unworthy judicial imprimatur to the false premise that once mentally ill, always mentally ill.

Dissenting from the denial of rehearing en banc, Judge VanDyke, joined by Judge Bumatay, stated that he agreed with Judge Bumatay’s dissent from the denial of rehearing en banc and wrote separately because he believes that the panel should have reconsidered the panel’s circular logic about *who* lies at the core of the Second Amendment. Judge VanDyke stated that the panel’s bootstrapping, class-based approach to defining those at the “core” of the Second Amendment was unjust and antithetical to controlling case law. Judge VanDyke also stated that the court’s intermediate

scrutiny jurisprudence is broken, at least as to Second Amendment claims.

COUNSEL

Vitaliy Kertchen (argued), Tacoma, Washington, for Plaintiff-Appellant.

Abby C. Wright (argued) and Michael S. Raab, Appellate Staff; Brian T. Moran, United States Attorney; Joseph H. Hunt, Assistant Attorney General; Civil Division, United States Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; for Defendants-Appellees.

ORDER

The panel judges have voted to deny Appellant's petition for rehearing. Judges Graber and Gould voted to deny the petition for rehearing en banc, and Judge Ezra recommended denying the petition for rehearing en banc.

The full court has been advised of the petition for rehearing en banc. A judge of the court requested a vote on en banc rehearing. The matter failed to receive a majority of votes of non-recused active judges in favor of en banc consideration. Fed. R. App. P. 35.

Appellant's petition for rehearing and petition for rehearing en banc, filed Docket No. 37, are **DENIED**.

COLLINS, Circuit Judge, dissenting from the denial of rehearing en banc:

As Judge Bumatay ably explains in Part IV(B) of his dissent, the panel’s application of intermediate scrutiny here is seriously flawed and creates a direct split with the Sixth Circuit. That alone is enough to warrant en banc review, and I therefore join that section of Judge Bumatay’s dissent. Moreover, I have substantial doubt that the framework of rules that this court uses to analyze Second Amendment claims properly construes the controlling principles set forth in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570 (2008), and granting en banc review in this case would have given us a welcome opportunity to reexamine that framework. I respectfully dissent from our failure to rehear this case en banc.

BUMATAY, Circuit Judge, with whom VANDYKE, Circuit Judge, joins, with whom IKUTA, BADE, and HUNSAKER, Circuit Judges, join as to Part IV, and with whom BENNETT, COLLINS, and BRESS, Circuit Judges, join as to Part IV.B, dissenting from the denial of rehearing en banc:

Today, our court advances an extraordinarily sweeping view of government power. Against the text, history, and tradition of the Second Amendment, we hold that the government may forever deprive a person of the individual right to bear arms—if that person spends even *one day* committed involuntarily, even as a *juvenile*, and no matter the person’s current mental health soundness. Of course, we only adopt this view for the Second Amendment. For other, more fashionable constitutional rights, we would not countenance such an abridgment.

When the Second Amendment was ratified, times were different. Firearms were ubiquitous and their regulation was sparse. Firearms were considered essential for defense of the home and hearth. *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, 635 (2008). While times have changed, the Constitution has not. The Second Amendment is not “a second-class right,” *McDonald v. City of Chicago, Ill.*, 561 U.S. 742, 780 (2010), so we must continue to uphold the right it confers against government encroachment. But by aggrandizing the government’s power here, we improperly relegate the Second Amendment to “disfavored right” status yet again. *Silvester v. Becerra*, 138 S. Ct. 945 (2018) (Thomas, J., dissenting from denial of certiorari).

In doing so, we seemingly treat some people as second-class citizens—concluding that they don’t deserve the full complement of fundamental rights. We don’t make that decision based on any present-day impairments or past criminal convictions, but, in the case of Duy Mai, for an involuntary commitment to a mental-health facility more than 20 years ago when he was just 17 years old. Because of that brief commitment as a teen, our court lets the federal government ban Mai—for *life*—from possessing a firearm. This, despite a state court finding that Mai is no longer mentally ill or dangerous. We justify this disturbing deprivation of a fundamental right by ignoring the history and tradition of the Second Amendment and applying ill-suited, foreign statistical studies that have no bearing on Mai’s circumstances. By failing to correct our errors here, we undermine our Second Amendment jurisprudence and give an unworthy judicial imprimatur to the false premise that “once mentally ill, always mentally ill.”

I respectfully dissent from the denial of rehearing en banc.

I.

By all accounts, Duy Mai is an American success story. Mai was born in a Thai refugee camp to a Vietnamese family and moved to the United States at the age of two. As so many immigrants have, Mai has flourished in this country.

Overcoming an early language barrier, Mai carved out a stellar academic and professional career. After starting at a community college, Mai graduated from the University of Washington with a 3.7 GPA and a degree in microbiology. While at the University of Washington, Mai's studies were inspired by a desire to help people living with HIV and, in his spare time, Mai volunteered for environmental and humanitarian causes. Post-graduation, Mai enrolled at the University of Southern California, where he focused on cancer research and received a master's in microbiology. After returning to Washington state, Mai started a job at the Benaroya Research Institute, concentrating on virology. As part of his job, he passed an FBI background check allowing him access to an irradiator. Today, Mai works as an immune monitoring specialist at the Seattle-based Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

Mai is similarly enriched in his home life. While at USC, Mai met a woman and they now raise eight-year-old twins. He remains close to his sister and parents and often meets them for weekend family dinners. He also enjoys wilderness activities and volunteer work.

Mai has been a productive member of society for nearly 20 years. But like most people, Mai has faced his share of challenges. At the age of 17, he suffered from depression, for which he was involuntarily committed to a mental health hospital for a little over two months total after a Washington state court determined that he might be a harm to others. But

since Mai's commitment order expired in August 2000, he has not been re-committed and his medical record shows no reoccurrence of serious mental illness. He has no criminal history or substance abuse issues.

Under state and federal law, Mai was barred from possessing a firearm due to his involuntary commitment. In 2014, Mai successfully petitioned the State of Washington to remove the state-law barrier. *See* Wash. Rev. Code § 9A.04.047(3)(c)(iii). Mai submitted his medical history showing that he's been free of depression since at least 2010 and that, based on the opinions of multiple psychologists, he is not considered a significant risk of suicide or harm to others. Based on this evidence and declarations from his friends and family, the Washington court agreed that Mai doesn't present a substantial danger to himself or to the public and that the symptoms that led to his commitment are not reasonably likely to reoccur. Thus, today, under state law, Mai's right to possess a firearm has been fully restored.

Mai's final hurdle is federal law. It prohibits an individual who has been "committed to a mental institution" from possessing a firearm. 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4). Mai brought an as-applied challenge to § 922(g)(4) and sought declaratory and injunctive relief declaring him eligible to possess a firearm under federal law and the Constitution. The district court granted the government's motion to dismiss. *Mai v. United States*, No. C17-0561 RAJ, 2018 WL 784582, at *6 (W.D. Wash. Feb. 8, 2018). Applying intermediate scrutiny, the district court rejected Mai's claim based on various studies linking mental illness to a heightened risk of gun violence. *Id.*

On appeal, this court affirmed. Without bothering itself with the text, history, or tradition of the Second Amendment, the court decided that, due to Mai's brief commitment, he

was not a “law-abiding, responsible” citizen and, therefore, not protected by the Second Amendment’s “core.” See *Mai v. United States*, 952 F.3d 1106, 1115 (9th Cir. 2020). In so ruling, the court compared Mai’s past commitment to a conviction for domestic violence. *Id.* The court also concluded that Washington’s adjudication of his mental soundness and subsequent restoration of his gun rights—and Mai’s present-day mental health status—were irrelevant to the constitutional analysis. *Id.* at 1115, 1120. Finally, with the help of studies from Sweden, Australia, Italy, and other countries, the court ruled that the permanent deprivation of Mai’s fundamental right cleared intermediate scrutiny. *Id.* at 1118–20. We should’ve corrected the layers of errors in this decision through en banc review.

II.

The Second Amendment guarantees that, “[a] well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” U.S. Const. amend. II. “[O]n the basis of both text and history,” the Second Amendment confers “an individual right to keep and bear arms.” *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 595. This guarantee was considered “among those fundamental rights necessary to our system of ordered liberty.” *McDonald*, 561 U.S. at 778.

Of course, this right is not without its limits. It does not guarantee a right to keep and carry “any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose.” *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 626. The Court noted, for example, that nothing in *Heller* should “be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill.” *Id.* But it recognized that there would be time to “expound upon the historical justifications for the exceptions . . . if and when those exceptions come

before” the Court. *Id.* at 635. *Heller*, in the meantime, observed that these “longstanding” prohibitions were “presumptively lawful regulatory measures.” *Id.* at 627 n.26.

Heller provided us the roadmap for Second Amendment claims. The Court looked to the Amendment’s words, Founding-era thinkers, and early court decisions to examine the scope of the Second Amendment right. *Heller*, thus, showed us exactly what to look at: the text, history, and tradition. *Id.* at 605, 625, 635. Importantly, the Court warned that the Second Amendment was not subject to a “freestanding ‘interest-balancing’ approach.” *Id.* at 634. The Court observed that the “very enumeration of the right takes out of the hands of government—even the Third Branch of Government—the power to decide on a case-by-case basis whether the right is *really worth* insisting upon.” *Id.* Accordingly, *Heller* squarely rejected the view that “the scope of the Second Amendment right should be determined by judicial interest balancing.” *McDonald*, 561 U.S. at 785.

Yet judicial interest balancing is exactly what our court does. Following *Heller*, our circuit, like many others, adopted a two-step test to adjudicate Second Amendment claims. First, we ask whether the statute at issue “burdens conduct protected by the Second Amendment[.]” *United States v. Chovan*, 735 F.3d 1127, 1136 (9th Cir. 2013). We decide this “based on a ‘historical understanding of the scope of the [Second Amendment] right[.]’” *Jackson v. City & Cty. of San Francisco*, 746 F.3d 953, 960 (9th Cir. 2014) (quoting *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 625). Second, having determined that the law burdens protected Second Amendment activity, we select the appropriate level of scrutiny based on our assessment of “(1) how close the law comes to the core of the Second Amendment right and

(2) the severity of the law’s burden on the right.” *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138 (simplified).

Judges across this country have questioned whether *Chovan*-type tests are consistent with *Heller*’s command to follow the text, history, and tradition in evaluating the scope of the Second Amendment. See, e.g., *United States v. McGinnis*, 956 F.3d 747, 762 (5th Cir. 2020) (Duncan, J., concurring) (encouraging the replacement of the Fifth Circuit’s two-step test in favor of *Heller*’s text and history mandate); *Ass’n of N.J. Rifle & Pistol Clubs, Inc. v. Attorney Gen. New Jersey*, 910 F.3d 106, 127 (3d Cir. 2018) (Bibas, J., dissenting) (arguing that *Heller* did not set up tiers of scrutiny with respect to regulations affecting the Second Amendment); *Mance v. Sessions*, 896 F.3d 390, 398 (5th Cir. 2018) (Ho, J., dissenting) (explaining that *Heller* instructs that fundamental constitutional rights are enshrined with the scope they were understood to have at the Founding); *Tyler v. Hillsdale Cty. Sheriff’s Dep’t*, 837 F.3d 678, 702 (6th Cir. 2016) (Batchelder, J., concurring) (encouraging the replacement of the Sixth Circuit’s two-step test in favor of a test that, as required by *Heller* and *McDonald*, looks to history and tradition); *id.* at 710 (Sutton, J., concurring) (arguing that history and tradition should inform the scope of the Second Amendment rather than tiers of scrutiny); *Ezell v. City of Chicago*, 651 F.3d 684, 701–02 (7th Cir. 2011) (Sykes, J.) (explaining that the scope of the Second Amendment right requires a historical inquiry into original meaning and does not leave room for interest-balancing); *Heller v. District of Columbia*, 670 F.3d 1244, 1271 (D.C. Cir. 2011) (Kavanaugh, J., dissenting) (“*Heller* and *McDonald* leave little doubt that courts are to assess gun bans and regulations based on text, history, and tradition, not by a balancing test such as strict or intermediate scrutiny.”); see also *N.Y. State Rifle & Pistol Ass’n, Inc. v. City of New*

York, 140 S. Ct. 1525, 1544 (2020) (Alito, J., dissenting) (“We are told that the mode of review in this case is representative of the way *Heller* has been treated in the lower courts. If that is true, there is cause for concern.”).

Indeed, when this court first adopted the two-step test, Judge Bea rightfully questioned whether applying tiers of scrutiny to a Second Amendment right was consistent with *Heller*. *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1143 (Bea, J., concurring). As Judge Bea noted, “[u]nitary tests such as strict scrutiny, intermediate scrutiny, undue burden, and the like don’t make sense . . . in the Second Amendment context because the language of *Heller* seems to foreclose scrutiny analysis.” *Id.* (quoting Eugene Volokh, *Implementing the Right to Keep and Bear Arms for Self-Defense: An Analytical Framework and a Research Agenda*, 56 UCLA L. Rev. 1443, 1443, 1461–73 (2009)) (simplified). Nevertheless, since *Chovan* didn’t challenge the application of an interest-balancing test, Judge Bea considered the question waived. *Id.*

I share these concerns. It is difficult to square the type of means-ends weighing of a government regulation inherent in the tiers-of-scrutiny analysis with *Heller*’s directive that a core constitutional protection should not be subjected to a “freestanding ‘interest-balancing’ approach.” *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 634. In fact, such an analysis is difficult to square with the interpretation of most constitutional rights. As Justice Scalia wrote, “[a] constitutional guarantee subject to future judges’ assessments of its usefulness is no constitutional guarantee at all.” *Id.* After all, “[t]he People, through ratification, have already weighed the policy tradeoffs that constitutional rights entail.” *Luis v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 1083, 1101 (2016) (Thomas, J., concurring). Our duty as unelected and unaccountable judges is to defer to the view of the people who ratified the

Second Amendment, which is itself the “very *product* of an interest balancing by the people.” *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 635. By ignoring the balance already struck by the people, and instead subjecting enumerated rights, like the Second Amendment, to our own judicial balancing, “we do violence to the [constitutional] design.” *Crawford v. Washington*, 541 U.S. 36, 67–68 (2004). Perhaps, this is why “[t]he Constitution does not prescribe tiers of scrutiny.” *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt*, 136 S. Ct. 2292, 2327 (2016) (Thomas, J., dissenting).

If operating on a clean slate, I would hew to *Heller*’s and *McDonald*’s fidelity to the Second Amendment’s history, tradition, and text. The precise contours of such a review should be subject to further refinement; but we might, as Justice Scalia suggested in *Heller* itself, look to the original meaning of the First Amendment. *See Heller*, 554 U.S. at 635 (suggesting categorical exceptions to the First Amendment as recognized at the Founding, such as obscenity, libel, and disclosure of state secrets); *see also Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 712 (Sutton, J., concurring) (opining that “*Heller* creates an on-off switch to the right to bear arms”). Under this view, a law may only constitutionally prohibit the core right to keep arms in the home for self-defense if the prohibition falls within an exception understood to be outside of the Amendment’s scope at the time of the Founding.

As the following section shows, when viewed under the original understanding of the Second Amendment, § 922(g)(4)’s application to Mai cannot pass muster.

III.

In the Founding era, little regulation surrounded the core right of gun ownership for self-defense of the home. As

recognized by *Heller*, the Founders understood the “[t]he right of self defence” as “the first law of nature” and “the true palladium of liberty[.]” *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 606 (quoting 1 St. George Tucker, *Blackstone’s Commentaries* 300 (1803)). William Rawle, a constitutional scholar and George Washington’s pick for Attorney General, noted that “[n]o clause in the Constitution could by any rule of construction be conceived to give to congress a power to disarm the people. . . . But if in any blind pursuit of inordinate power, [congress] should attempt it, [the Second] amendment may be appealed to[.]” William Rawle, *A View of the Constitution of the United States* 125–26 (2d. ed 1829). When proposing a model constitution for Virginia in 1776, Jefferson included within the document the explicit guarantee that “[n]o free man shall be debarred the use of arms in his own lands.” *The Jefferson Encyclopedia* 51 (Foley ed., reissued 1967).

Historical regulations of the right to bear arms focused more on how people *used* weapons—not who could own them. For example, in 1840, the Alabama Supreme Court upheld a ban on the secret carrying of guns and knives. *State v. Reid*, 1 Ala. 612, 614–15, 622 (1840); *see also Aymette v. State*, 21 Tenn. 154 (1840) (upholding a statute making the carrying of a concealed weapon a crime); *State v. Chandler*, 5 La. Ann. 489, 489–90 (1850) (same). In 1846, the Supreme Court of Georgia noted that at the time of the Founding there was a distinction between “a law prohibiting the exercise of the right [to bear arms], and a law merely regulating the manner of exercising that right.” *Nunn v. State*, 1 Ga. 243, 247 (1846). Consequently, a state legislature could ban the concealed-carry of a gun, so long as the ban did not infringe upon the “*natural* right of self-defence, or of [the] constitutional right to keep and bear arms.” *Id.* at 251.

Indeed, the first decision addressing a firearms regulation based on the *condition* of a person (rather than the manner of carrying) did not arise until 1886. See C. Kevin Marshall, *Why Can't Martha Stewart Have A Gun?*, 32 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Pol'y 695, 711 (2009) (citing *State v. Shelby*, 2 S.W. 468, 469 (Mo. 1886)) (hereinafter, "*Martha*"). In *Shelby*, the Supreme Court of Missouri upheld a restriction on the carrying of a deadly weapon while intoxicated. 2 S.W. at 469. Similarly, late 19th century laws in Michigan and the District of Columbia restricted weapons ownership for minors. See *Martha* at 712 n.93. But as a Texas state court explained, the state may have "the power by law to regulate the wearing of arms, with a view to prevent crime, but it has not the power to enact a law the violation of which will work a forfeiture of defendant's arms." *Jennings v. State*, 5 Tex. Ct. App. 298, 300 (1878) (striking down a law requiring forfeiture of guns used during a crime under the state constitution).

It should come as no surprise, then, that scholars have "search[ed] in vain through eighteenth-century records to find any laws specifically excluding the mentally ill from firearms ownership." Carlton F.W. Larson, *Four Exceptions in Search of a Theory: District of Columbia v. Heller and Judicial Ipse Dixit*, 60 Hastings L.J. 1371, 1376 (2009). Such laws would be highly unusual in a context where regulations focused on use rather than ownership. Not until 1930 do we see laws specifically touching on gun ownership and mental health, after the ABA-approved Uniform Firearms Act prohibited delivery of a pistol to any person of "unsound" mind. *Id.* at 1376 (quoting *Handbook of the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws and Proceedings of the Fortieth Annual Conference* 563 (1930)). The Act, first drafted in 1926, sought to promote uniform state laws on firearms. Legislation, *The*

Uniform Firearms Act, 18 Va. L. Rev. 904, 904–05 (1932). It was adopted by Pennsylvania in 1931, *id.* at 905 n.9, and other states passed similar laws in the following decades, *see, e.g.*, 1965 N.Y. Laws 2343, 2472 (codified at N.Y. Penal Law §400.00.1 (McKinney 2008)). The statute at issue here, § 922(g)(4), was not enacted until 1968. Gun Control Act of 1968, Pub. L. No. 90-618, 82 Stat. 1213, 1220.

Given the paucity of Founding-era laws specifically prohibiting gun ownership by the mentally ill, we are better served by exploring the dominant thinking on mental illness in that period. On this, the evidence is clear: temporary mental illness didn’t lead to a permanent deprivation of rights.

Influential philosophers of the day understood that rights attach with the attainment of “reason” and, correspondingly, the loss of rights persisted only through the loss of reason. *See Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 705–06 (Batchelder, J., concurring) (citing 1 Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui, *The Principles of Natural and Politic Law* 82 (1747); John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1691), reprinted in 4 John Locke, *The Works of John Locke* 207, 339, 342 (12th ed. 1824); 1 Frederick Pollock & Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* 507–08 (1898)). This understanding accorded with a deeply rooted common law tradition recognizing that mental illness was not a permanent condition. *See id.* at 707–14 (Sutton, J., concurring) (citing 1 William Blackstone, *Commentaries* *304–05; Anthony Highmore, *A Treatise on the Law of Idiocy and Lunacy* 104 (1807)).¹ Thus, an “insane” person

¹ For example, in 1689, a Virginia court ordered the confinement of John Stock, who kept “running about the neighborhood day and night in sad Distracted Condition to the great Disturbance of the people” to

was one who “by disease, grief, or other accident hath lost the use of his reason.” 1 William Blackstone, *Commentaries* *304. But “the law always imagines, that the[] accidental misfortunes [that caused the lunacy] may be removed” and at that point the person’s rights restored. *Id.* at *304–05; see 1 Frederick Pollock & Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* 507–08 (1898); see also Anthony Highmore, *A Treatise on the Law of Idiocy and Lunacy* 73 (1807) (“[A] lunatic [was] never to be looked upon as irrecoverable.”).

These views on the mentally ill were reflected in historical practices and laws. Even as Virginia sought to ratify its constitution with a limitation on the civil rights of “lunatics,” such limitation was only “during their state of insanity.” 1 St. George Tucker, *Blackstone’s Commentaries: With Notes of Reference, to the Constitution and Laws, of the Federal Government of the United States; and of the Commonwealth of Virginia* 145 (1803). Virginia recognized that “an[c]ient law” mandated that the insane should recover their rights when “they recovered their senses.” *Id.* For example, even if a former “lunatic[]” had his property taken, he was free to petition a tribunal to establish that “he was now restored to his Understanding” in order to re-claim the property. Charles Viner, *A General Abridgment of Law and Equity* 138 (1741). And while judicial officials were authorized to “lock up” “lunatics” or “other individuals with dangerous mental impairments” (thereby depriving them of all rights), they were “locked up only so long as such lunacy or disorder shall continue, and no longer.” Henry Care, *English Liberties, or the Free-born*

prevent “his doeing any further Mischiefe.” Gerald N. Grob, *Mad Among Us* 16 (1994). But Stock was to be confined only “until hee bee in a better condition to Governe himself.” *Id.*

Subject's Inheritance 329 (6th ed. 1774). Similarly, the statute of limitations affecting a claimed property right would not run against a mentally ill person until the “removal of his disability and knowledge of the existence of” such right. See *Dicken v. Johnson*, 7 Ga. 484, 494 (1849).

From this historical record a clear picture emerges: mental illness was considered a *temporary* ailment that only justified a *temporary* deprivation of rights. At the time of the Founding, the idea that the formerly mentally ill were permanently deprived of full standing in the community was nowhere to be found. Thus, § 922(g)(4)'s permanent prohibition on those “formerly committed to a mental institution” patently burdens the Second Amendment right of an individual, like Mai, who has been adjudicated to be no longer mentally ill and whose commitment was long ago.

Heller's observations about “presumptively lawful regulatory measures” does not change this analysis. See *United States v. Torres*, 911 F.3d 1253, 1262 (9th Cir. 2019). *Heller's* reference to firearm prohibitions for the “mentally ill” as being “presumptively lawful,” 554 U.S. at 626, 627 n.26, apply to those who are *presently* mentally ill. “[A] good rule of thumb for reading [Court] decisions is that what they say and what they mean are one and the same.” *Mathis v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 2243, 2254 (2016). As such, we view these categories as “well-defined and narrowly limited.” *Jackson*, 746 F.3d at 960 (quoting *Brown v. Entm't Merchants Ass'n*, 564 U.S. 786, 791 (2011)). Accordingly, nothing in these categories contravenes the historical evidence that mental illness was considered a *temporary* status with no lifelong legal consequences. Because Mai is

not currently mentally ill, he doesn't belong in that "presumptive" category.²

With no historical support for this type of permanent restriction, or even an analogous restriction, § 922(g)(4) as applied to Mai violates the Second Amendment's command that "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." U.S. Const. amend. II. Accordingly, we should have said as much and reversed the district court's decision.

IV.

As I have shown, § 922(g)(4)'s application to Mai has no basis in the text, tradition, and history of the Second Amendment. But until our court agrees to apply such a test to Second Amendment claims under en banc review or the Court provides us with further guidance, we remain bound by the *Chovan* test. But even under that test, the court *still* got it wrong. The court first incorrectly identified intermediate scrutiny as the proper standard of review and then flubbed its application. These errors were further reason to revisit this case.

A.

As discussed, *Chovan* calls for a two-step process. First, we determine if the law "burdens conduct protected by the Second Amendment," *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1136, "based on a historical understanding of the scope of the [Second

² As the Sixth Circuit held, "*Heller's* presumption of lawfulness should not be used to enshrine a permanent stigma on anyone who has ever been committed to a mental institution for whatever reason." *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 688. To do so "would amount to a judicial endorsement of Congress's power to declare, 'Once mentally ill, always so.'" *Id.*

Amendment] right[.]” *Jackson*, 746 F.3d at 960 (9th Cir. 2014) (simplified). Second, we decide what level of scrutiny applies based on our assessment of “(1) how close the law comes to the core of the Second Amendment right and (2) the severity of the law’s burden on the right.” *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138 (simplified). Depending on the answers to these questions, we determine our review on a sliding scale ranging from intermediate scrutiny to per se unconstitutionality. See *Silvester v. Harris*, 843 F.3d 816, 821 (9th Cir. 2016). A law, like the complete handgun ban examined in *Heller*, that imposes “such a severe restriction” on the core Second Amendment right that “it amounts to a destruction of [that] right” is per se unconstitutional. See *Bauer v. Becerra*, 858 F.3d 1216, 1222 (9th Cir. 2017) (simplified). A “law that implicates the core of the Second Amendment right and severely burdens that right”—without totally destroying it, like a ban on large-capacity magazines—“warrants strict scrutiny.” *Duncan v. Becerra*, No. 19-55376, 2020 WL 4730668, at *22 (9th Cir. Aug. 14, 2020) (quoting *Silvester*, 843 F.3d at 821, 827). For all other laws that do not implicate the core Second Amendment right or do not substantially burden that right, like a short waiting period to purchase firearms, we apply intermediate scrutiny. *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1262 (citing *Jackson*, 746 F.3d at 961); *Silvester*, 843 F.3d at 823.

The court erred at both steps of the *Chovan* analysis. At step one, the court assumed, rather than decided, that § 922(g)(4) as applied to Mai burdens conduct protected by the Second Amendment right. *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1114. But by dodging the question of “which perspective better comports with the historical evidence,” *id.*, the court sidesteps *Heller*’s command to review the text, history, and tradition of the Amendment. *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 605, 625, 635. But when we suspect that a question may implicate a

“core” constitutional concern, “we should do more before tossing it aside.” *Fazaga v. FBI*, 965 F.3d 1015, 1079 (9th Cir. 2020) (Bumatay, J., dissenting). Furthermore, when undertaking a constitutional analysis, “[w]e should resolve questions about the scope of [our] precedents in light of and in the direction of the constitutional text and constitutional history.” *Edmo v. Corizon, Inc.*, 949 F.3d 489, 506 (9th Cir. 2020) (Bumatay, J., dissenting) (quoting *Free Enter. Fund v. Public Co. Accounting Oversight Bd.*, 537 F.3d 667, 698 (D.C. Cir. 2008) (Kavanaugh, J., dissenting)).

By punting the analysis of the historical scope of the Second Amendment and its impact on the formerly mentally ill, we let false assumptions cloud our judgment and distort our precedent even further from the original understanding of the Constitution. Had we done the requisite analysis, we would have recognized that this law not only burdens Second Amendment-protected conduct, but that it also strikes at the core right protected by its guarantee. Instead, our court skips this important step—an omission that infects the rest of the *Chovan* analysis.

The court erred again at *Chovan* step two, by incorrectly identifying intermediate scrutiny as the proper standard.³ As we have recently explained, step two of *Chovan* “is a simple inquiry: if a law regulating arms adversely affects a law-abiding citizen’s right of defense of hearth and home, that law strikes at the core Second Amendment right.” *Duncan*, 2020 WL 4730668, at *12; *Jackson*, 746 F.3d at 961

³ Without reference to our precedent, Mai apparently agreed that intermediate scrutiny should apply to his case. See *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1115. Nevertheless, “we are not bound to decide a matter of constitutional law based on a concession.” *Colo. Republican Fed. Campaign Comm. v. Fed. Election Comm’n*, 518 U.S. 604, 622 (1996).

(recognizing that laws which regulate only the “manner in which persons may exercise their Second Amendment rights” are less burdensome than those which “bar firearm possession completely”) (quoting *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138); *see also Heller*, 554 U.S. at 635 (“[W]hatever else it leaves to future evaluation, [the Second Amendment] surely elevates above all other interests the right of law-abiding, responsible citizens to use arms in defense of hearth and home.”).

Under this framework, the application of § 922(g)(4) to Mai strikes at the core Second Amendment right—and guts it. Indeed, § 922(g)(4) completely deprives Mai of the ability to possess a firearm, even within the home, where protections are “at their zenith.” *Duncan*, 2020 WL 4730668, at *12 (quoting *Kachalsky v. Cty. of Westchester*, 701 F.3d 81, 89 (2d Cir. 2012)). In any other context, laws that burden the core of a fundamental right are invariably analyzed under heightened scrutiny—e.g., restrictions on the “content” of speech rarely survive strict scrutiny, e.g., *Brown v. Entm’t Merchs. Ass’n*, 564 U.S. 786, 799 (2011), nor do laws that restrict “core” political speech, *see, e.g., McIntyre v. Ohio Elections Comm’n*, 514 U.S. 334, 347 (1995); *Buckley v. Am. Constitutional Law Found., Inc.*, 525 U.S. 182, 207 (1999) (Thomas, J., concurring). We should not treat the Second Amendment any different. Instead, we should have recognized that § 922(g)(4) effects a complete deprivation of Mai’s core Second Amendment right and held the law unconstitutional as applied to him.

At a minimum, the law is a “substantial burden” on the core Second Amendment right, warranting the application of strict scrutiny. *Duncan*, 2020 WL 4730668, at *22. But the court evaded any form of strict scrutiny, despite admitting that § 922(g)(4)’s “lifetime ban” on Mai’s Second

Amendment right was “quite substantial,” by minimizing the law’s burden as falling on only a “narrow class” of individuals. *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1115. In doing so, the court seemingly pulls new doctrine out of its hat and magically transforms a fundamental right that belongs to an individual, *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 592, into one that is class-based. Rather than face the total and permanent deprivation of the core Second Amendment right for Mai (and the class of people like him), the court refocused the inquiry on the *size* of the class. And ta-da!, the court holds, intermediate scrutiny applies. Like most magicians, the court refused to explain its act.⁴ Because the law deprives only a “narrow class” of individuals their Second Amendment right, ipse dixit, it is analyzed only under intermediate scrutiny. Such reasoning is even more perplexing given that heightened scrutiny was originally announced as a method to protect the rights of “discrete and insular minorities.” *See United States v. Carolene Prods. Co.*, 304 U.S. 144, 152 n.4 (1938). Today, according to the court, the fact that Mai belongs to a “narrow class” is, paradoxically, *the very reason* to lower the level of scrutiny applied to him. We should have corrected this jurisprudential sleight of hand.

Next, the court justified its decision to apply intermediate scrutiny by refusing to recognize Mai as a “law-abiding, responsible citizen.” But its refusal to do so is baffling. Besides a brief involuntary commitment as a youth, nothing in the record shows that Mai is anything but

⁴ The court cites to *Tyler* for its analysis, *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1115, but *Tyler* provides no reasoning for the class-based burden approach and only cites to a Tenth Circuit case for that proposition. *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 691 (citing *United States v. Reese*, 627 F.3d 792, 802 (10th Cir. 2010)). In turn, the Tenth Circuit case merely announces the proposition with no accompanying analysis. *Reese*, 627 F.3d at 792. So the court falls into a rabbit hole within rabbit holes to justify its conclusion.

a “law-abiding, responsible citizen.” Instead, it shows that Mai is a person of advanced education and demonstrated professional achievement, with strong community and family support and no history of criminal activity or substance abuse. Yes, he suffered from significant depression as a teen, but recent psychological evaluators and Washington state have concluded he is not currently mentally ill and presents no risk of violence to others or himself. Nor is that reasonably likely to change in the future. Washington, in turn, restored his right to possess firearms under state law.

But this court decided it knows better, holding that, “[r]egardless of [Mai’s] present-day peaceableness,” Mai is *not* a “law-abiding, responsible citizen” because of his brief commitment 20 years ago. *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1115. The court, with no analysis, held that “[t]he same logic” used to prohibit a domestic-violence convict from possessing a firearm applied here—to a person like Mai. *Id.* (citing *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138).⁵ But a criminal conviction is not the same as mental illness. Unless pardoned, expunged, or set aside, a conviction always remains a conviction under the law. *See, e.g.*, 18 U.S.C. § 921(a)(20)(B), (33)(B)(ii). And,

⁵ In *Chovan*, we found § 922(g)(9)’s prohibition on firearm possession by domestic-violence misdemeanants didn’t implicate the “core” Second Amendment protection because the law’s burden fell only on “individuals with criminal convictions.” *Chovan*, F.3d at 1138. The court doesn’t justify why mental illness fits into the same category. Indeed, while civil commitment often results from threats of physical harm, some states allow civil commitment where no risk of physical harm is present at all. *See, e.g.*, Haw. Rev. Stat. § 334-1 (“substantial” emotional injury on others); Iowa Code § 229.1(20) (“serious” emotional injury on others); Kan. Stat. Ann. § 59-2946(f)(1)–(3) (property damage); La. Stat. Ann. §§ 28:55(E)(1), 28:2(10) (substance abuse); N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 135-C:34, 135-C:2(X) (noncontinuous alcohol abuse).

at least for felony convictions, there is historical support for a law resulting in forfeiture of property and rights. See 2 William Blackstone, *Commentaries* *377 (describing the possible punishments of serious crime as including “confiscation, by forfeiture of lands, or moveables, or both, or of the profits of lands for life: others induce a disability, of holding offices or employments, being heirs, executors, and the like”); see also *United States v. McCane*, 573 F.3d 1037, 1049 (10th Cir. 2009) (Tymkovich, J., concurring) (“[T]he application of § 922(g) to a violent felon . . . would appear appropriate under any Second Amendment reading. After all, felons lose out on fundamental rights such as voting and serving on juries, and face discrimination that need only survive rational basis review.”). As we have said, “felons are categorically different from the individuals who have a fundamental right to bear arms.” *United States v. Vongxay*, 594 F.3d 1111, 1115 (9th Cir. 2010).

So, while the law may hold that “once a convict, always a convict,” tradition, history, and elementary psychology teach us that “once mentally ill, *not* always mentally ill.” This is the distinction that the court ignores. Indeed, under the court’s extreme reading of the law, any person falls outside of the Constitution’s core protection if that person spends even *one day* in commitment—even as a youth! Nothing in the text, history, and tradition of Constitution supports this view. The proper inquiry would have recognized that the lifetime ban imposed by § 922(g)(4) on Mai is unequivocally a complete deprivation of his core right to home gun ownership. As such, the law is unconstitutional.

B.

Even accepting the court’s error and analyzing Mai’s claim under intermediate scrutiny, we still got it wrong.

To satisfy intermediate scrutiny, the government’s statutory objective must be “significant, substantial, or important,” and there must be a “reasonable fit” between the challenged law and that objective. *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1115 (quoting *Silvester*, 843 F.3d at 821–22).⁶ The burden of satisfying intermediate scrutiny is demanding and rests entirely on the government. *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515, 533 (1996). It doesn’t require the court to approve “shoddy data or reasoning.” See *City of Los Angeles v. Alameda Books, Inc.*, 535 U.S. 425, 438 (2002). We demand “consistency and substantiality” in the evidence the government uses to establish a sufficient fit between its means and ends. *Lalli v. Lalli*, 439 U.S. 259, 274 (1978) (quoting *Mathews v. Lucas*, 427 U.S. 495, 515 (1976)). The proffer of “loose-fitting generalities” in the form of statistical data is insufficient to clear intermediate scrutiny. See *Craig v. Boren*, 429 U.S. 190, 191–92, 202–04, 209 (1976) (rejecting to the use of “broad sociological propositions” to particularized applications under heightened scrutiny).

Here, the court disclaims any adherence to the false assumption that “once mentally ill, always mentally ill.” The court also fully professes to believe in Mai’s current mental health. But, once we acknowledge that Mai has no present-day mental health impairment, what justifies the deprivation of his fundamental right? Apparently, according to the court, Swedish statistical studies.

⁶ As Judge VanDyke traces in his dissent, our court transplanted the “reasonable fit” standard from the First Amendment context, where it was used to evaluate *neutral, incidental* burdens on speech. VanDyke, J., dissenting at 46. I join Judge VanDyke in questioning whether this standard inappropriately waters down the exacting scrutiny required to review the complete deprivation of a fundamental right.

In justifying the “reasonable fit” between the government’s objective here, the court relies on several ill-suited studies, many compiling data from foreign countries. One of the primary studies relied on by the court analyzed suicide risk after release from involuntary commitment, but offered no information about suicide risk for someone like Mai—20 years past his commitment and free of mental health issues.⁷ See also *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 696 (finding this same study insufficient to “explain why a lifetime ban [on gun possession] is reasonably necessary”). The court admits the inapplicability of this study to someone like Mai. See *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1121. But undeterred, the court offers additional studies, perhaps even more inapplicable, such as a study focused on patients from Sweden,⁸ “community care” patients from Italy and Australia,⁹ an “[o]ut-patients”

⁷ Of the patients considered, 98% were considered for only a year following their commitment, and the remaining 2% were studied from 2.5 to 8.5 years post-commitment. E. Clare Harris & Brian Barraclough, *Suicide as an Outcome for Mental Disorders: A Meta-Analysis*, 170 *Brit. J. Psychiatry* 205, 219 (1997) (hereinafter “*Meta-Analysis*”). The study doesn’t include any research into the suicide risk at 10, 15, and 20 years out from commitment—even while recognizing that “[s]uicide risk seems highest at the beginning of treatment and diminishes thereafter.” *Meta-Analysis* at 223.

⁸ In one study of “[p]reviously hospitalised patients,” 80% of the observations were from Sweden and involved all types of psychiatric diagnoses, not just depression. See *Mai*, 953 F.3d at 1118 (citing *Meta-Analysis* at 220–21); Allgulander C. et al., *Risk of Suicide by Psychiatric Diagnosis in Stockholm County. A Longitudinal Study of 80,970 Psychiatric Inpatients*, 241 *Eur. Archives Psychiatry Clinical Neuroscience* 323, 324 (1992); Appendix, Figure 1.

⁹ In this study of “[c]ommunity care patients,” 86% of observations were patients from Italy and Australia (the United States represented a mere 4% or three total observations). *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1118 (citing

study with a meager 34 observations,¹⁰ and another study of predominately foreign patients (with some U.S. data from 1969).¹¹

The court offered no reasoned explanation of how a fundamental right can be contingent on off-point studies conducted overseas, *see Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1117–18 (relying on *Meta-Analysis*), despite the Supreme Court counseling against relying on such inapposite data. *See Craig*, 429 U.S. at 201.

The court’s application of intermediate scrutiny here requires more of a rifle’s precision, not a shotgun’s spread. *See Ass’n of N.J. Rifle & Pistol Clubs, Inc.*, 910 F.3d at 133–34 (Bibas, J., dissenting) (“Intermediate scrutiny requires more concrete and specific proof before the government may restrict any constitutional right, period.”). The panel’s cited studies fail to meet this standard because none demonstrate a “*continued* risk presented by people who were involuntarily committed many years ago and who have no history of intervening mental illness, criminal activity, or substance abuse.” *Tyler*, 837 F.3d at 699. If we are to accede to the permanent deprivation of Mai’s fundamental right, we should, at a minimum, demand evidence sufficiently tailored to his circumstances. *See id.* (remanding to the district court

Meta-Analysis at 221); *see* Appendix, Figure 2. The court doesn’t even define “community care,” much less its relevance to Mai.

¹⁰ *Mai*, 252 F.3d at 1118 (citing *Meta-Analysis* at 220–21); *see* Appendix, Figure 3.

¹¹ *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1118 (citing *Meta-Analysis* at 221); *see* Appendix, Figure 4.

to allow the government to present “additional evidence explaining the necessity of § 922(g)(4)’s lifetime ban”).

V.

Many years ago, judges took a turn as pseudo-psychologists and waded into whether a woman’s mental health may be balanced against her constitutional rights. *See Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200 (1927). That case is generally not treated kindly today. I fear the court goes down the same path.

Heller’s endorsement of text, history, and tradition as the proper lens for evaluating the scope of the Second Amendment was not accidental. There, the Court emphatically disapproved of courts determining on an ad hoc basis whether certain individuals were undeserving of the full complement of fundamental rights. Duy Mai deserves better. Our Constitution deserves better. I respectfully dissent from the denial of rehearing en banc.

APPENDIX

Figure 1

Table 14e Previously hospitalised patients – all psychiatric diagnoses

Report/SMR	Country	Suicides	
		Observed	Expected
Allgulander <i>et al</i> (1992)	Sweden	1115	152.90*
Black <i>et al</i> (1985a)	USA	68	3.21
James & Levin (1964)	Australia	75	14.21
Temoche <i>et al</i> (1964)	USA	147	32.40
SMR 693 (95% CI 657–73)	Total	1405	202.72

*Expected value calculated by us; SMR, standardised mortality ratio.

Figure 2

Table 14g Community care patients – all psychiatric diagnoses

Report/SMR	Country	Suicides	
		Observed	Expected
Amaddeo <i>et al</i> (1995)	Italy	30	1.72
Cantor <i>et al</i> (1992)	Australia	34	3.00*
Corton <i>et al</i> (1991)	Belgium	6	0.23
Segal & Kotler (1991)	USA	3	0.79*
Sturt (1983)	England	1	0.04*
SMR 1280 (95% CI 1111–1608)	Total	74	5.78

*Expected value calculated by us; SMR, standardised mortality ratio.

Figure 3

Table 14f Out-patients – all psychiatric diagnoses

Report/SMR	Country	Suicides	
		Observed	Expected
Beck <i>et al</i> (1990)	USA	17	1.12*
Koranyi (1977)	Canada	11	0.35
Martin <i>et al</i> (1985)	USA	6	0.41
SMR 1809 (95% CI 1252–2527)	Total	34	1.88

*Expected value calculated by us; SMR, standardised mortality ratio.

Figure 4

Table 14h All treatment settings – all psychiatric diagnoses

	Country	Suicides	
		Observed	Expected
Babigian & Oodoroff (1969)	USA	133	14.73
Hoenig & Hamilton (1966)	England	3	0.13*
Innes & Millar (1970)	Scotland	30	1.10
King & Barraclough (1990)	England	77	4.10
Rorsman (1974)	Sweden	49	5.20
Old age			
Robinson (1989)	England	1	0.17*
SMR 1152 (95% CI 1024–1292)	Total	293	25.43

*Expected value calculated by us; SMR, standardised mortality ratio.

VANDYKE, Circuit Judge, with whom BUMATAY, Circuit Judge, joins, dissenting from denial of rehearing en banc:

In the final paragraph of its opinion rejecting Mai's Second Amendment claim, the panel emphasized that "[w]e emphatically do not subscribe to the notion that 'once mentally ill, always so.'" *Mai v. United States*, 952 F.3d 1106, 1121 (9th Cir. 2020). I believe them. Yet just like the government's position in this case, the panel's decision inescapably effectuates exactly that ethic. How can this court purport to be applying "heightened" scrutiny, yet bless a legal position and practical outcome everyone insists isn't true?

The answer is a simple four-letter word: guns. It is hard to conceive of any other area of the law where, given the opportunity to apply heightened scrutiny, this court would countenance for a moment an outcome rooted in the scientifically indefensible, morally repugnant, and legally insufficient concept of "once mentally ill, always so." Mr. Mai could understandably take personally this court's labeling of him as a second-class citizen (more on that below). But he shouldn't. Our court cannot really believe that, just because a currently healthy individual decades ago suffered from mental illness, they are permanently relegated to a disfavored status impervious to even heightened scrutiny. Mr. Mai is not a second-class citizen—not in this court's eyes or anyone else's. He's just seeking to exercise a second-class right. He is another innocent casualty of this court's demonstrated dislike of things that go bang. Perhaps Mr. Mai can take faint solace in the fact that, were he seeking to exercise any other right entitled to heightened scrutiny, he would no doubt get the judicial review he plainly merits.

Mai, and all others who have overcome mental illness, deserve better than to be permanently designated second-class citizens, particularly as it relates to their equal participation in a *fundamental* right. I therefore agree entirely with Judge Bumatay’s dissent and write separately to expound on two of the reasons this case deserved en banc attention.

First, our en banc court should have reconsidered and corrected the panel’s circular logic about *who* lies at the “core” of the Second Amendment. By lumping individuals like Mai into overbroad groups that, as a whole, may pose heightened risks of violence, the panel has effectively given governments *carte blanche* to legislate the Second Amendment away. The panel’s classist approach labels many law-abiding, responsible citizens like Mai non-law-abiding, irresponsible citizens, outside the protections of the Second Amendment. No evidence suggests Mai is mentally ill, yet the panel’s rationale labels him so, for life. The panel then uses this grouping to lower the applicable level of scrutiny, which in turn relaxes (or eliminates) the requirement that a restriction should substantially fit the government objective. It’s circular. All this, when the “core” of the Second Amendment in *Heller* is about protected *conduct*—not people.

Second, our intermediate scrutiny jurisprudence is broken, at least as to Second Amendment claims. We have appropriated a “reasonable fit” standard from the First Amendment context, where it was used to evaluate *neutral*, *incidental* burdens on speech. Not only have we pilfered a test ill-suited to *direct* burdens on a *different* fundamental right, we have further diminished that already too-anemic test. Our track record on the Second Amendment is quite

poor, and the analytical maltreatment exhibited again in this case only adds to the rap sheet.

I. ASSUMPTIONS, PRESUMPTIONS, AND THE “CORE” OF THE SECOND AMENDMENT RIGHT

A. The Panel’s Awkward Assumption at *Chovan* Step 1

The panel sidestepped the difficult task of determining whether 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4) burdens Mai’s Second Amendment rights (*Chovan* Step 1) by simply assuming it did. *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1114–15. According to the panel, a restriction does not burden a Second Amendment right if it fits a presumptively lawful ban in *Heller* (felons or the mentally ill) or regulates conduct outside the scope of the Second Amendment. *Id.* at 1114 (referencing *Unites States v. Chovan*, 735 F.3d 1127, 1136 (9th Cir. 2013)). Blanketly banning firearm possession clearly implicates the *scope* of the Second Amendment, so, if the panel had decided Mai’s case at *Chovan* Step 1, it could only uphold § 922(g)(4) as applied to Mai by concluding that he is properly included amongst “the mentally ill.” Faced with either holding that Mai’s past mental illness rendered him perpetually mentally ill (once mentally ill, always so) or admitting that Mai had the same Second Amendment right as any other law-abiding citizen, the panel punted. *Id.* at 1115. This “well-trodden” analytical technique is generally fine, but here the panel buried the lede in *Chovan* Step 1 to avoid the awkwardness of expressly saying up front what it implicitly concluded in *Chovan* Step 2, Prong 1: that Mr. Mai’s long-ago mental illness forever excludes him from the community of “law-abiding, responsible citizens” under the Second Amendment (i.e., once mentally ill, always so). *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138.

B. After Assuming the Statute Burdens Mai's Second Amendment Rights, the Panel Concluded Mai Is "Well Outside the Core of the Second Amendment."

Chovan Step 2 is a two-prong inquiry to determine the appropriate level of scrutiny: (1) how close the law comes to the core of the Second Amendment and (2) the severity of the law's burden on that right. *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138. As to the second prong, the panel correctly recognized that § 922(g)(4) severely burdens Mai's Second Amendment right and amounts to a lifetime ban on firearm ownership. *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1115.

This put all the pressure on the panel's Prong 2 "core" analysis. The panel first determined Mai was not a law-abiding, responsible citizen because of his *former* mental illness. *Id.* (likening Mai to domestic violence misdemeanants). From this, and despite § 922(g)(4)'s severe burden on Mai's Second Amendment rights, the panel concluded that § 922(g)(4) "falls well outside the core of the Second Amendment right." *Id.* The panel then deemed a lower level of scrutiny appropriate, because a "lifetime ban" on the formerly committed "burdens only a narrow class of individuals who are not at the core of the Second Amendment." *Id.*

The panel believes class-based categorical bans are permissible under intermediate scrutiny, so long as those bans target groups that pose a heightened risk of violence. *Id.* at 1116. Because some metrics indicate that individuals *recently* involuntarily committed are more violent than the general public, the panel surmises that the firearm ban, as applied to Mai (who was committed as a juvenile decades

ago), survives intermediate scrutiny.¹ *Id.* at 1116–17. But this standard abandons *any* reasonable fit requirement. Presumably, the panel’s version of “intermediate scrutiny” would uphold firearm bans as applied to young men, the poor, or the entire 2008 Florida Gators football team.² Ironically, the *broader* the class, the more likely it is to pass this standard. Suppose Congress instituted a firearm ban against *anyone who has committed a crime*—from jaywalkers to violent felons. That “all criminals” classification would withstand scrutiny under the panel’s standard because, when lumped together into one group, that group—as a whole—poses a heightened risk of violence just because *some* members of that group do. Whether committing murder or activating the turn signal too late, under the panel’s rationale, “all criminals” are no longer law-abiding, responsible citizens entitled to basic Second Amendment rights.

Of course, this is absurd and circular. Step 1: Congress bans firearm possession for a broad class of people including some sub-class therein that poses a heightened risk of violence. Step 2: Our court says the broad class is outside “core” of the Second Amendment. Step 3: We say the

¹ For the reasons Judge Bumatay ably explains, those metrics’ relevance to Mai’s circumstances is dubious at best, and clearly insufficient to meet any form of heightened scrutiny with real teeth.

² As of 2013, 34% of the 2008 Florida Gators football team had been arrested. Many were charged with violent crimes, including at least one who was convicted of a notorious murder. See Greg Bishop, *Hernandez Among Many Who Found Trouble at Florida in the Meyer Years*, N.Y. TIMES (July 6, 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/07/sports/ncaaf/football/hernandez-among-many-arrested-at-florida-in-the-meyer-years.html>. But the team was also graced by model citizen Tim Tebow, who, I’m sure we can all agree, could be trusted to own a firearm (and probably raise our children).

individual in the broad class is also outside the core, even though no evidence says he belongs to a violent sub-class, and all the evidence suggests otherwise. Step 4: We lower the level of scrutiny and relax the “fit” requirement so that a wildly overbroad prohibition can be deemed “reasonable.” This bootstrapping approach is an ingenious but insidious way to render the Second Amendment a paper tiger. See *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1148 (Bea, J., concurring) (“If ... the terms ‘law-abiding’ and ‘responsible’ are not tied to ‘felons’ and ‘mentally ill,’ how are the lower courts to recognize the limits of the ‘law-abiding, responsible citizen’ standard?”).

C. The “Core” of the Second Amendment Right has Nothing to Do with Classes of People.

The panel references *Chovan* (which quotes from *Heller*) for the principle that “[t]he core of the Second Amendment is ‘the right of law-abiding, responsible citizens to use arms in defense of hearth and home.’” *Id.* at 1115 (quoting *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1138). According to the panel, this supported its decision to subject different classes of people to different tiers of scrutiny. *Id.* But this “core” standard finds no support in and misrepresents *Heller*.

Although the panel concludes that certain privileged classes of people constitute the “core of the Second Amendment” (while, by extension, other classes like the one it lumped Mai into don’t), the *Heller* Court never applied this test to the right’s *holders*, but only to its *substance*. The word “core” appears only twice in *Heller* and both times describes the *activity* protected by the Second Amendment. *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, 630 (2008) (“the *core* lawful purpose of self-defense”) (emphasis added); *id.* at 634 (reasoning that handgun ownership is the “*core* protection” of the Second Amendment) (emphasis added).

Heller never used “core,” or its like, to discuss the Second Amendment’s application to individuals. But the panel nonetheless splices language—separated by fifty-four pages from *Heller*’s actual individual rights analysis—to support its claim that the formerly mentally ill lie outside the core of the Second Amendment. See *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1115; compare *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 581 (“We move now from the holder of the right—‘the people’—to the substance of the right”) with *id.* at 635 (“And whatever else it leaves to future evaluation, it surely elevates above all other interests the right of law-abiding, responsible citizens to use arms in defense of hearth and home.”).

Heller actually cuts against the panel’s supposition. The *Heller* Court noted that the six other constitutional provisions that guarantee rights to “the people” refer unambiguously to the same class of individuals: namely, “all members of the political community.” *Id.* at 580 (First, Second, Fourth, Ninth, Tenth, and Seventeenth Amendments). *Heller* then concluded that “the Second Amendment right is [likewise] exercised individually and belongs to *all Americans*.” *Id.* at 581 (emphasis added). Does the panel’s contrary logic mean groups or individuals may also be placed outside the “core” of other constitutional rights?

I’m certain this court would say no. The Supreme Court has repeatedly declined to do so. Instead, it takes an all-or-nothing approach to delineate the scope of individuals included in a constitutional protection *and then* applies an appropriate level of scrutiny to the regulatory burden on the *substance* of that right, if necessary. See, e.g., *Boumediene v. Bush*, 553 U.S. 723, 771 (2008) (holding that enemy combatants are entitled to the privilege of habeas corpus); *Demore v. Kim*, 538 U.S. 510, 531 (2003) (aliens not entitled

to bail hearings during removal proceedings under Due Process Clause); *Jones v. Helms*, 452 U.S. 412, 419–20 (1981) (convicted felons have no fundamental right to travel); *Richardson v. Ramirez*, 418 U.S. 24, 54–56 (1974) (states can prevent convicted felons from voting). Just this year, the Supreme Court reaffirmed this approach. See *Agency for Int’l Dev. v. All. for Open Soc’y. Intl., Inc.*, 140 S. Ct. 2082, 2086 (2020). There, the Court held that “foreign organizations operating abroad ... possess no rights under the First Amendment.” *Id.* at 2087. The foreign organizations’ *status* didn’t dictate the Court’s selected tier of scrutiny—indeed, scrutiny appears nowhere in the decision. *Id.* at 2085–89. On the contrary, the Court’s decision was categorical: the plaintiffs don’t have First Amendment rights. *Id.* at 2087.

Our court, too, has generally refused to apply a *Mai*-style, second-class citizen “core” analysis to rights guaranteed to “the People.” See, e.g., *Rodriguez v. Swartz*, 899 F.3d 719, 730 (9th Cir. 2018) (extending the *full* protection of the Fourth Amendment to a Mexican citizen shot on Mexican soil by American officer on American soil), *cert. granted, judgment vacated*, 140 S. Ct. 1258 (2020); *Deorle v. Rutherford*, 272 F.3d 1272, 1285 (9th Cir. 2001) (ruling that mentally disturbed individuals are protected by the Fourth Amendment right against excessive force); *Maag v. Wessler*, 960 F.2d 773, 775 (9th Cir. 1991) (per curiam) (holding that mentally ill individuals are *fully* protected by the Fourth Amendment), *as amended on denial of reh’g* (Apr. 1, 1992).

In this case, the panel invents a *class scrutiny* standard in order to quietly lump *Mai* into a class (“the mentally ill”) to which it wouldn’t explicitly consign him at *Chovan* Step 1. It then leverages intermediate scrutiny to allow it to ignore

the group’s obvious overbreadth, thereby allowing anyone who has ever suffered from mental illness to be deprived of their Second Amendment rights for life, regardless of their present condition. Once mentally ill, always so. *But see Heller*, 554 U.S. at 634–35 (“Constitutional rights are enshrined with the scope they were understood to have when the people adopted them, whether or not ... future judges think that scope too broad.”). Consistently applied, this class-based recharacterization about the “core” of the Second Amendment would bode ill for our foregoing scrutiny of laws burdening other fundamental rights. But we would never allow such subtle and slippery reasoning to so grievously burden the rights of “the People” protected elsewhere by the Constitution. This disparate treatment is unacceptable, even as applied to one of this circuit’s least-favored constitutional provisions. By refusing to acknowledge that it is giving second-class treatment to the Second Amendment, the panel tragically relegates folks like Mai to permanent second-class status.

II. LOWERING HEIGHTENED SCRUTINY

Of course, any concerns about the panel’s circular class-based rationale bankrupting other constitutional rights is probably misplaced. This appears to be a “one-show-only” phenomenon specially reserved for the Second Amendment. Particularly in that context, we have watered down the “reasonable fit” prong of intermediate scrutiny to little more than rational basis review.

The panel cited circuit precedent when articulating the reasonable fit standard: “the statute simply needs to promote a substantial government interest that would be achieved less effectively absent the regulation.” *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1116 (quoting *United States v. Torres*, 911 F.3d 1253, 1263 (2019)). Whatever kind of fit that requires, it

certainly isn't *reasonable*. A *grossly overbroad* regulation with just a *miniscule bit* more effectiveness meets that standard. A law that banned firearm ownership for “young men” or “anyone who has committed any crime” would meet that standard. Such a standard is an incomplete and incorrect tool for measuring regulations that facially burden a fundamental right.

The panel not only applies this inappropriate standard (see Section I, above), it applies it inappropriately. The “reasonable fit” language the panel relied upon was crafted for use in a specific, and very different, context: *facially neutral* regulations that *incidentally* burden freedom of speech in a way that is *no greater than is essential*. It's worth exploring how this standard stumbled its way from the First to the Second Amendment and arrived here.

A. The “Reasonable Fit” Standard Is Born and Promptly Diluted.

The trail begins at the well-known *United States v. O'Brien*, where the Court dealt with a war protester who burned his draft card. 391 U.S. 367, 369 (1968). O'Brien argued the prohibition on burning draft cards violated his freedom of speech, *id.* at 370, while the government claimed it needed to ensure the ready accessibility of issued draft cards. *Id.* at 378. The Court reasoned:

[W]e think it clear that a government regulation is sufficiently justified ... if it furthers an important or substantial governmental interest; if the governmental interest is unrelated to the suppression of free expression; and if the *incidental* restriction on alleged First Amendment freedoms is *no*

greater than is essential to the furtherance of that interest.

Id. at 377 (emphasis added). The restriction in *O'Brien* was (a) incidental and (b) no greater than was essential to further an important or substantial government interest. Both qualifications are critical to the *O'Brien* test, but subsequent cases purporting to apply it neglected these qualifications.

In *United States v. Albertini*, the defendant argued his First Amendment rights were violated because he was banned from entering a military base and thereby prevented from peacefully protesting during an open house on Armed Forces Day that was generally open to the public. 472 U.S. 675, 677–78 (1985) (the defendant had previously improperly entered military bases and destroyed government documents). The Court disagreed: “an *incidental* burden on speech is *no greater than is essential*, and therefore is permissible under *O'Brien*, so long as the *neutral regulation* promotes a substantial government interest that would be achieved less effectively absent the regulation.” *Id.* at 689 (emphasis added).³

In *Ward v. Rock Against Racism*, musicians argued the denial of a permit to perform in a public space due to repeated past noise violations burdened their First Amendment rights. 491 U.S. 781, 785 (1989). Quoting from *Albertini*, the Court affirmed that a speech regulation must be:

³ *Albertini*'s recitation of the *O'Brien* standard is confusing and probably oxymoronic. But even *Albertini*'s word jumble is a poor fit in Mai's case, where the regulation is neither incidental, nor neutral, nor “no greater than is essential.”

narrowly tailored to serve the government's legitimate, content-neutral interests but that it need not be the least restrictive or least intrusive means of doing so. Rather, the requirement of narrow tailoring is satisfied so long as the ... regulation promotes a substantial government interest that would be achieved less effectively absent the regulation.

Id. at 798–99 (internal quotation marks omitted). *Ward* further clarified that the speech regulation may not “burden substantially more speech than is *necessary* to further the government’s legitimate interests.” *Id.* at 799 (emphasis added) (“Government may not regulate expression in such a manner that a substantial portion of the burden on speech does not serve to advance its goals.”). Yet while *Ward* explicitly described the regulation as a *content-neutral, incidental* burden on speech, *id.* at 791–92, it curiously omitted the word “neutral” from its *Albertini* quotation. Compare *id.* at 799 (“so long as the ... regulation”) with *Albertini*, 472 U.S. at 689 (“so long as the neutral regulation”). As a result, later cases citing *Ward* likewise fail to note that the test was crafted to analyze neutral, incidental burdens on speech.

We cited the *Ward* language in *Colacurcio v. City of Kent* to uphold a content-neutral, narrowly tailored regulation of nude dancing performances. 163 F.3d 545, 553 (9th Cir. 1998) (upholding ordinance requiring nude dancers to perform at least ten feet away from patrons for health and safety reasons). *Colacurcio* notably reaffirmed that a regulation evaluated under this test may not burden substantially more speech than necessary to further the government’s interests. *Id.*

B. The Ninth Circuit Leans into the Watered-Down Standard.

But things went sideways when we jumped from the First to the Second Amendment. In *Fyock v. Sunnyvale*, 779 F.3d 991 (9th Cir. 2015), for the first time, we applied a *sub-Albertini* standard (lacking explicit *neutrality*, *incidental burden*, and *not substantially more burdensome than necessary* language) to a regulation that squarely and severely burdened the fundamental right to keep and bear arms. *Id.* at 1000. The *Fyock* plaintiffs challenged a regulation restricting possession of higher-capacity magazines under the Second Amendment. *Id.* at 994–95. The court upheld the restriction, holding that “[the government] was required to show *only that* [the regulation] promotes a ‘substantial government interest that would be achieved less effectively absent the regulation.’” *Id.* at 1000 (quoting *Colacurcio*, 163 F.3d at 553)) (emphasis added). And there it is. Quietly and fatally, we watered down a First Amendment “reasonable fit” requirement (of dubious value to the Second) to a Second Amendment test the government could drive a truck through.

Our cases have subsequently cited and applied *Fyock*’s (un)reasonable fit requirement.⁴ But this isn’t heightened scrutiny at all. Originally developed to analyze *neutral* regulations that *incidentally* burdened First Amendment

⁴ See, e.g., *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1263; *United States v. Singh*, 924 F.3d 1030, 1057–58 (9th Cir. 2019), *cert. granted, judgment vacated sub nom. Azano Matsura v. United States*, 140 S. Ct. 991 (2020), and *cert. denied*, 140 S. Ct. 1265 (2020); *Pena v. Lindley*, 898 F.3d 969, 979 (9th Cir. 2018); *Mahoney v. Sessions*, 871 F.3d 873, 882–83 (9th Cir. 2017); *Bauer v. Becerra*, 858 F.3d 1216, 1226–27 (9th Cir. 2017); *Silvester v. Harris*, 843 F.3d 816, 829 (9th Cir. 2016).

rights in a way that was *no greater than was essential*, this test would have been a poor fit for direct restrictions on Second Amendment rights (i.e., 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(4)) even if we hadn't plied it with diazepam.

C. The Panel Doubles Down on “Relaxed” Heightened Scrutiny.

Mai quotes *Torres*, which quoted *Fyock*, and that's how we arrived at our present predicament. *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1116 (quoting *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1263 (upholding prohibition on illegal aliens possessing firearms)). In our Second Amendment cases, therefore, a reasonable fit under intermediate scrutiny demands *only* that the regulation “simply needs to ‘promote[] a substantial government interest that would be achieved less effectively absent the regulation.’” *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1263 (quoting *Fyock*, 779 F.3d at 1000) (quotation marks omitted); *Mai*, 952 F.3d at 1116. The result? The end of *any* regulatory tailoring and the advent of limitless regulatory overbreadth.

There was a glimmer of good sense in *Young v. Hawaii*, where a panel of our court held that the Second Amendment “encompasses the right of a responsible law-abiding citizen to carry a firearm openly for self-defense outside of the home.” 896 F.3d 1044, 1048 (9th Cir. 2018), *reh’g en banc granted*, 915 F.3d 681 (9th Cir. 2019). That panel astutely recognized and avoided the same problem we see in *Mai*—that the reasonable fit standard was significantly weaker than it ought to be:

According to the dissent, the only question a court must answer under intermediate scrutiny is whether the government action promotes a substantial government interest that would be achieved less effectively absent

the regulation. That is incomplete, because a court must also determine whether the government action burdens substantially more protected conduct than is necessary to further that interest. Thus, while intermediate scrutiny surely does not require the government to pursue the *least* restrictive means of achieving an important interest, the substantial overbreadth or impreciseness of a government action must be considered.

Id. 1072–73 (cleaned up; internal citations omitted) (quoting *Turner Broad. Sys., Inc. v. F.C.C.*, 520 U.S. 180, 213–14, (1997)). Refreshing indeed—an insistence that *overbreadth* be a salient consideration in the reasonable fit analysis! But our en banc court reasserted our errant orthodoxy and vacated *Young*. *Young v. Hawaii*, 915 F.3d 681, 682 (9th Cir. 2019).

In *Mai*'s as-applied challenge, § 922(g)(4) clearly burdens substantially more protected conduct than is necessary to advance Congress's interests (disarming "the mentally ill"). The statute's permanent, total burden on *Mai*'s Second Amendment right is far more restrictive than necessary to further the government's interest in preventing gun violence. Yet the panel and the precedent it cites simply omit that additional prong of the test.

Instead, the panel applied our court's adulterated and incomplete version of the "reasonable fit" standard—a standard that in its current form (with our downward modifications) is unfit to size up even *neutral* regulations that incidentally burden free speech rights. But basic logic (constitutional and otherwise) tells us that we should demand a closer regulatory fit for a law that *directly* burdens a

fundamental right than that which imposes *neutral, incidental* burdens on a fundamental right. If the panel had undertaken real heightened scrutiny, or even just faithfully applied the test as articulated in *O'Brien*, *Albertini*, *Ward*, or *Colacurcio*, § 922(g)(4) could not have withstood Mai's challenge.

It's time to face reality: the requirement we applied in *Fyock*, *Torres*, and *Mai* is no requirement at all. Government burdens on the Second Amendment may not always need to fit into skinny jeans, but they should never come dressed in clown pants. The current "reasonable fit" standard makes it embarrassingly easy for the government to sustain its regulations. Heightened scrutiny should have some, well, height. Our en banc court spurned a golden opportunity to reaffirm that intermediate scrutiny is, indeed, a form of *heightened* scrutiny.

D. This Circuit Treats the Second Amendment Like a Second-Class Constitutional Right.⁵

To the rational observer, it is apparent that our court just doesn't like the Second Amendment very much. We always uphold restrictions on the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms.⁶ Show me a burden—any burden—on

⁵ See *Peruta v. Cty. of San Diego*, 824 F.3d 919, 945 (9th Cir. 2016) (en banc) (Callahan, J., dissenting) ("The Second Amendment is not a 'second-class' constitutional guarantee." (citing *McDonald v. City of Chicago*, 561 U.S. 742, 780 (2010))).

⁶ See, e.g., *Torres*, 911 F.3d at 1264–65 (upholding ban on illegal aliens possessing firearms); *Pena*, 898 F.3d at 973 (upholding ban on purchasing particular firearms); *Mahoney*, 871 F.3d at 883 (upholding limitations on police officers using department-issued firearms); *Bauer*, 858 F.3d at 1227 (upholding use of firearm sales fees to fund

Second Amendment rights, and this court will find a way to uphold it. Even when our panels have struck down laws that violate the Second Amendment, our court rushes in en banc to reverse course. *See, e.g., Teixeira v. County of Alameda*, 873 F.3d 670, 690 (9th Cir. 2017) (en banc) (reversing panel’s invalidation of a regulation prohibiting the right to purchase and sell firearms); *Peruta v. County of San Diego*, 824 F.3d 919, 942 (9th Cir. 2016) (en banc) (reversing panel’s invalidation of city law requiring showing of special self-defense need to obtain conceal carry permit where open carry was also prohibited); *Young v. Hawaii*, 896 F.3d 1044, 1074 (9th Cir. 2018) (discussed above), *reh’g en banc granted*, 915 F.3d 681 (9th Cir. 2019).⁷ Other rights don’t

enforcement efforts against illegal firearm purchasers); *Silvester*, 843 F.3d at 829 (upholding 10-day waiting period for purchasers who have already cleared a background check in less than 10 days); *Fyock*, 779 F.3d at 1001 (upholding city’s ban on high-capacity magazines); *Jackson v. City & County of San Francisco*, 746 F.3d 953, 970 (9th Cir. 2014) (upholding city’s firearm and ammunition regulations); *Chovan*, 735 F.3d at 1142 (upholding ban on domestic violence misdemeanants owning firearms despite not committing domestic violence for 15 years); *United States v. Vongxay*, 594 F.3d 1111, 1118 (9th Cir. 2010) (upholding ban on felons possessing firearms).

⁷ Very recently, a panel of our court struck down another California regulation as violating the Second Amendment. *See Duncan v. Becerra*, No. 19-55376, 2020 WL 4730668, at *2 (9th Cir. Aug. 14, 2020). Given our court’s history recounted above, court observers are of course already forecasting an inevitable en banc reversal. *See, e.g., Don Thompson, 9th Circuit ends California ban on high-capacity magazines*, WASH. POST (Aug. 14, 2020) (“We expect an en banc panel will rehear the case and correct this ... out-of-step decision.”) (source omitted), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/9th-circuit-ends-california-ban-on-high-capacity-magazines/2020/08/14/f77751cc-de52-11ea-b4f1-25b762cdbbf4_story.html.

receive such harsh treatment.⁸ There exists on our court a clear bias—a real prejudice—against the Second Amendment and those appealing to it. That’s wrong. Equal justice should mean *equal* justice.

III. CONCLUSION

The panel’s bootstrapping, class-based approach to defining those at the “core” of the Second Amendment is unjust and antithetical to controlling case law. Here, our court’s unacknowledged antipathy toward the Second Amendment forced the panel into the unenviable position of condoning the perverse result of “once mentally ill, always so,” notwithstanding its authentic disapproval of that obviously immoral canard.

Our toothless “heightened” scrutiny of Second Amendment restrictions is broken, and not accidentally so.

⁸ See e.g., *Nat’l Inst. of Family & Life Advoc. v. Harris*, 839 F.3d 823, 845 (9th Cir. 2016) (holding law requiring anti-abortion pregnancy centers to provide notice of publicly funded family-planning services, including abortions, did not violate First Amendment), *rev’d and remanded sub nom. Nat’l Inst. of Family & Life Advoc. v. Becerra*, 138 S. Ct. 2361 (2018); *Italian Colors Rest. v. Becerra*, 878 F.3d 1165, 1179 (9th Cir. 2018) (holding California statute prohibiting retailers from imposing surcharge on payments by credit card violated First Amendment); *Latta v. Otter*, 771 F.3d 456, 476 (9th Cir. 2014) (holding states’ anti-gay marriage laws violated Equal Protection Clause and due process); *deLaurier v. San Diego Unified Sch. Dist.*, 588 F.2d 674, 684 (9th Cir. 1978) (holding school district’s mandatory maternity leave policy did not violate Equal Protection Clause); *Valley Broad. Co. v. United States*, 107 F.3d 1328, 1336 (9th Cir. 1997) (holding federal ban prohibiting broadcast advertisements of casino gambling violated First Amendment); *Monterey Mech. Co. v. Wilson*, 125 F.3d 702, 715 (9th Cir. 1997) (holding “state program setting goals for ethnic and sex characteristics of construction subcontractors” violated Equal Protection Clause).

But Second Amendment rights are fundamental, and litigants attempting to vindicate theirs deserve better than what we're currently offering, for "[t]he very enumeration of the right takes out of the hands of government—even the Third Branch of Government—the power to decide on a case-by-case basis whether the right is *really worth* insisting upon." *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 634.

I respectfully dissent.