

# Massachusetts Gun Control Success – A False & Dangerous Narrative

*Massachusetts Gun Laws are Arguably Costing Lives*



A special report by Gun Owners' Action League detailing the failure of twenty years of gun control in the Commonwealth.

Two decades ago the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed a sweeping set of new gun laws known as the Gun Control Act of 1998. It was passed on the heels of the Federal "Assault Weapons" ban in 1994. The Massachusetts' legislation is listed in the legislative records as Chapter 180 of the Acts of 1998 and is commonly referred to as "Chapter 180." The bill contained eighty sections of new gun law and was approved on July 23, 1998.

The following findings represent two decades of evidence after the passage of these new "gun control" laws. The report utilizes the latest available information at the time.

When determining the success, or failure, of gun laws it is vitally important to break it down into at least three major categories in order to determine the effectiveness. This is incredibly important, as different types of problems need different solutions. For instance, we would not try to solve a suicide issue the same way we would attempt to address a homicide issue. To rationally address a potential problem, success or failure the three major categories are:

1. Firearm Safety, as measured by firearm related accidental deaths;
2. Criminal Use of Firearms, as measured by firearm related murders;
3. Suicides by means of firearms.

Quite often the proponents of gun control simply use the term "gun death rate" as they tout the successes of Chapter 180. This method does not accurately reflect the true story as proven in the following findings.

## Firearm Safety (Accidental Deaths)

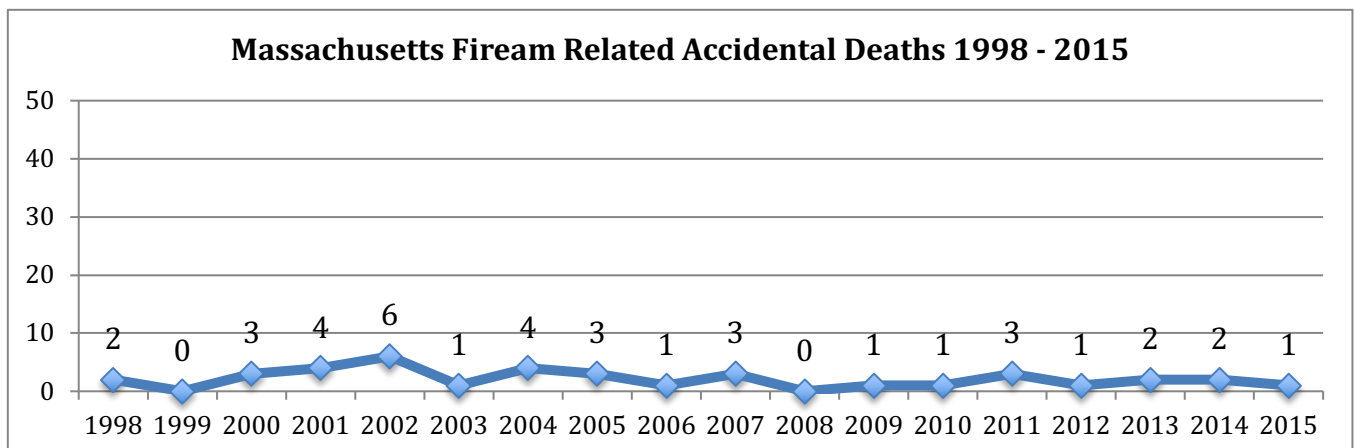
Massachusetts has historically enjoyed a very low accidental death rate with guns. This is due to lawful gun owners taking the lead in making safety programs widely available to the general public. Gun Owners' Action League, and our local affiliates, have been providing firearm safety education for many decades. A parallel program is also provided nationally through the Hunter Education Program. Hunter Ed, as it is referred to, was established in 1970 and is funded through excise taxes on firearms. It should be noted that **all of these gun safety programs are exclusively funded by gun owners themselves.**

Historically and currently the government of the Commonwealth does not contribute any financial resources to gun safety programs. This is despite the millions of dollars in firearm licensing fees it collects on an annual basis. It is perhaps ironic at best that a state that supposedly prides itself on gun safety, actually takes no part in it.



One only needs to compare the accidental death rates with motor vehicles. In 1998 there were approximately 4.5 million licensed drivers in the Commonwealth resulting in 473 fatalities in motor vehicle accidents. Compare this to 1.5 million licensed gun owners (at the time) and only 2 accidental fatalities. Statistically there is no comparison in the safety factor.

As for accidental gun fatalities, since Chapter 180 was passed there has been no decrease in firearm related accidental deaths. Perhaps that is because statistically there never was a problem. That statement is always hard to accept in a society when it is often said "if it only saves one life". But the harsh reality is that in 2015 **Massachusetts lost 1,751 to overdoses/poisons, 732 to falls and 416 people to transportation related accidents.** Only one person was killed that year in a gun accident and the data does not reflect if that may have been as a result of criminal activity. The evidence clearly shows that Massachusetts gun control laws, including mandatory gun storage laws, have had no effect on accidental deaths.



## Criminal Use of Firearms (Homicides)

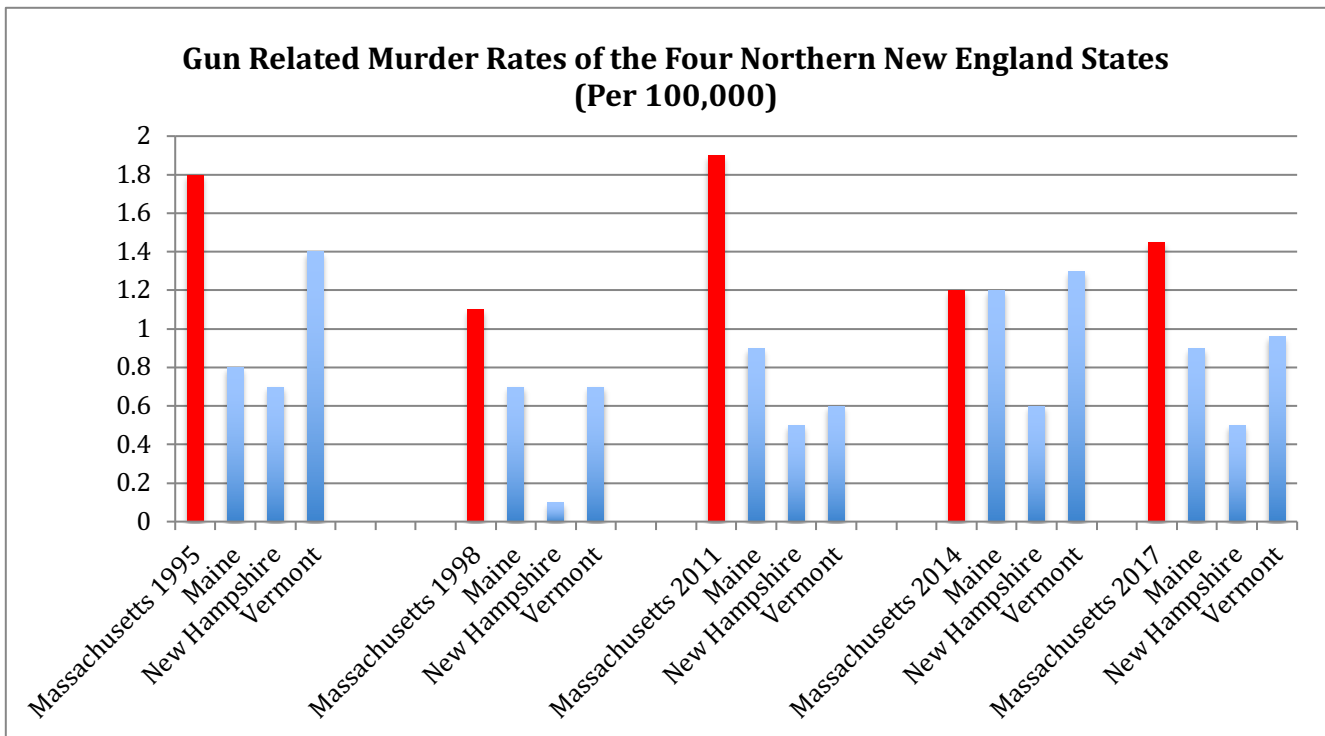
When originally passed into law, Chapter 180 was promoted to the general public as an attempt at “leading the nation in common sense gun control” as a means in reducing gun violence. That being the case, very specific data needs to be looked at to assess any success or failure of said laws. Massachusetts’ gun control advocates often herald that the state maintains the second to the lowest “gun death rate” in the country. However, when the data is separated out to reflect gun related homicides that claim does not stand up.

The new 2017 FBI crime report recently released shows that Massachusetts actually ranks 12<sup>th</sup> in the United States for gun related homicides. For years, so-called gun control advocates touted Massachusetts’ gun laws as a great success story in reducing gun homicides while harshly criticizing our northern New England neighbors for having supposed weak gun laws. The 2017 FBI crime report statistics paints a far different picture. In fact, since the infamous passage of the 1998 Gun Control Act, the Commonwealth’s gun related murder rate has increased from 1.06 (per hundred thousand) to 1.45. Where is the success?

In the graph below, we examined the FBI Uniform Crime reports in 1998, 2011, 2014 and 2017. From this data it is easy to determine that Massachusetts is not the second to the lowest when it comes to gun related homicide rates. In fact in 2011, a particularly bad year in the Commonwealth, Massachusetts was actually ranked number seventeen in the nation. (*Firearm Related Murder Rate by State, Per 100,000 2011 FBI Crime Report*) What the data actually shows is that the three northern New England states have consistently lower murder rates (per 100,000) than Massachusetts. In only one of the years represented (2014) did Vermont exceed Massachusetts.

According to the report, New Hampshire has the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest gun related murder rate with a 0.5 per 100,000, nearly one-third that of Massachusetts, which is 1.45 (per 100,000). Maine comes in 6<sup>th</sup> place with a 0.9 (per 100,000) and Vermont in 8<sup>th</sup> place with a 0.96 (per 100,000). The facts are clear that those states that are often blamed for “weak gun laws” are, in fact, much safer places to live.

If one takes into consideration all types of murder, the 2017 FBI crime report, shows Massachusetts drops to 13<sup>th</sup> place with a 2.49 per 100,000 rating. No surprise, New Hampshire continues to rank as the safest state in the nation with a rating of 1.04 per 100,000. Maine and Vermont also beat the Commonwealth again ranking 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> places, respectively.



Perhaps the true assessment in any gun laws passed in the Commonwealth is to compare the state to itself from the point at which the law was enacted. With nearly two decades of data to review, it should be easy to determine success or failure.

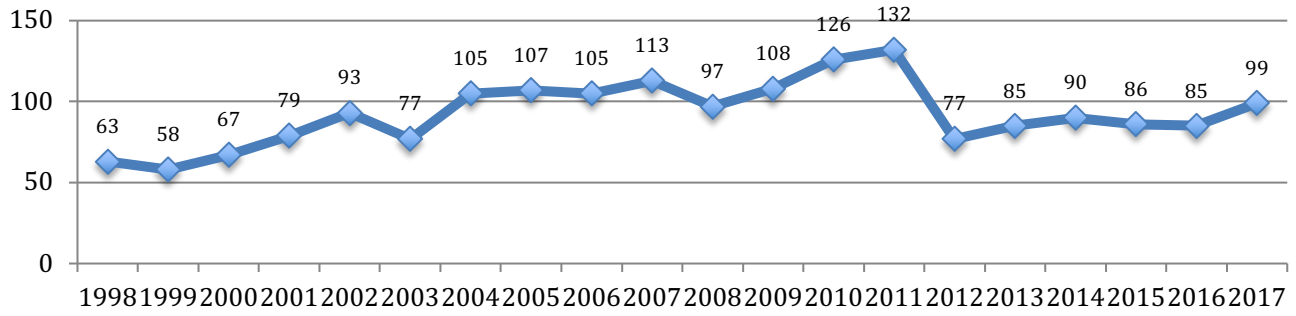
Within the Massachusetts Department of Public Health there is a program called the Injury Surveillance Program (ISP). This program tracks injuries and deaths throughout the state in several different categories and manners.



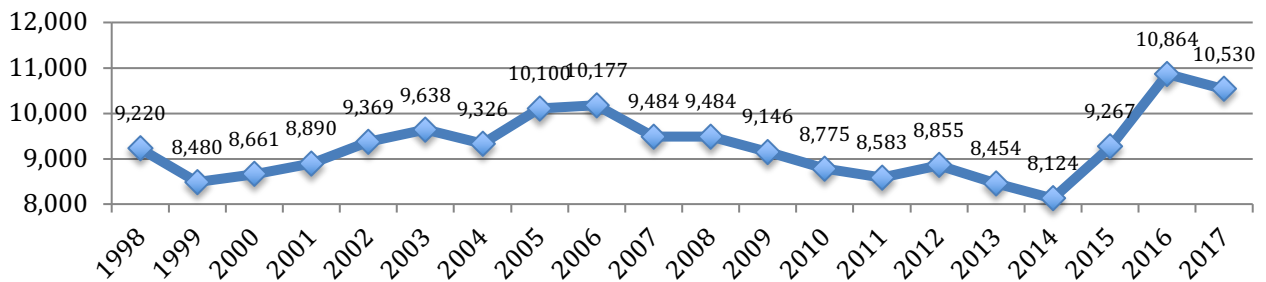
For the purposes of assessing the 1998 Gun Control Act's effect at reducing gun deaths from violence we can look directly at the data collected By the FBI Crime Reports and the State's ISP Reports regarding gun related homicides.

According to ISP reports, in the four years **preceding Chapter 180, there was a drastic decrease** in gun related homicides in Massachusetts. Immediately following the passage of Chapter 180, gun related homicides began to rise. At one point the number of firearm related murders more than doubled. In 2011 and 2012 there was a decline mirroring the national decline that began in 2007. It is important to note that the **State's decline was years behind the national trend**. Even with this, the numbers were still not an improvement from 1998 and the numbers are rising again.

**Massachusetts Gun Related Homicides 1998 - 2017**



**National Firearm Murders 1998 - 2017**



Even if we look at gun related assault injuries that did not result in deaths, but rather hospital stays tracked by ISP there is still a major increase. In 1998 there were 96 reported gun assault injuries and in 2105 there were 236. This represents more than doubling the number of gun assault injuries since the passage of Chapter 180. Commonwealth's gun laws have been a massive failure to address gun crime.

## Suicides

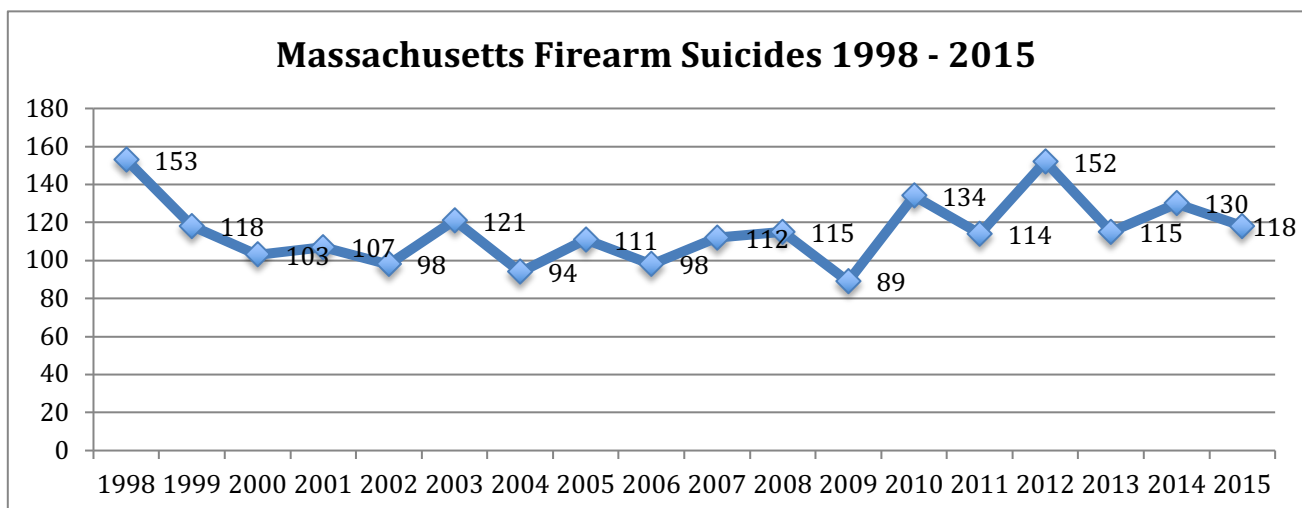
Suicides are a national epidemic that will have to be addressed in a serious manner at some point. Massachusetts lost a golden opportunity to do so during the so-called “Red Flag” bill debates. Despite GOAL’s attempts to provide direct help for people suffering from mental health issues, the new law is void of it.

When reviewing any success with gun related suicides, in regards to Chapter 180 it must first be noted that Massachusetts has a very low suicide rate, in general, compared to the rest of the nation. This includes suicides by any means. The Commonwealth normally ranks in the lowest four or five states. Among these consistently are New York, New Jersey and the District of Columbia (DC). This is an interesting dichotomy as DC is consistently the murder capital of the country.

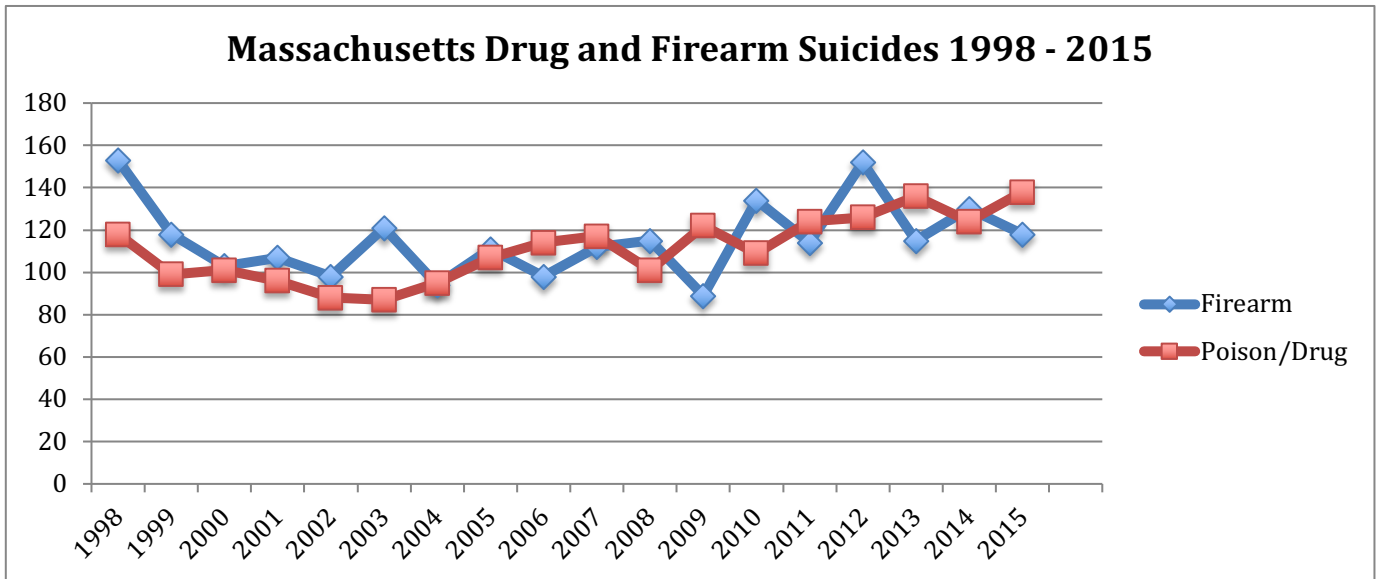
However, it is easy to speculate why these states have an overall low suicide rate and that is simply the quality of, and access to, mental health care. As much as it could be improved in the Commonwealth, it is still one of the best in the country. In every chart regarding general suicide numbers, the more rural a state is, the higher the suicide rate is. Massachusetts is consistently at the lower end of the spectrum and states like Montana normally at the higher end.

The Commonwealth’s well below average suicide rate is the reason why proponents of Chapter 180 use the term “Gun Death Rate”. It is a disingenuous means of making the law artificially appear successful. Supporters of gun control would argue that the gun laws are responsible for the State’s low suicide rate, but there is no evidence to support that claim.

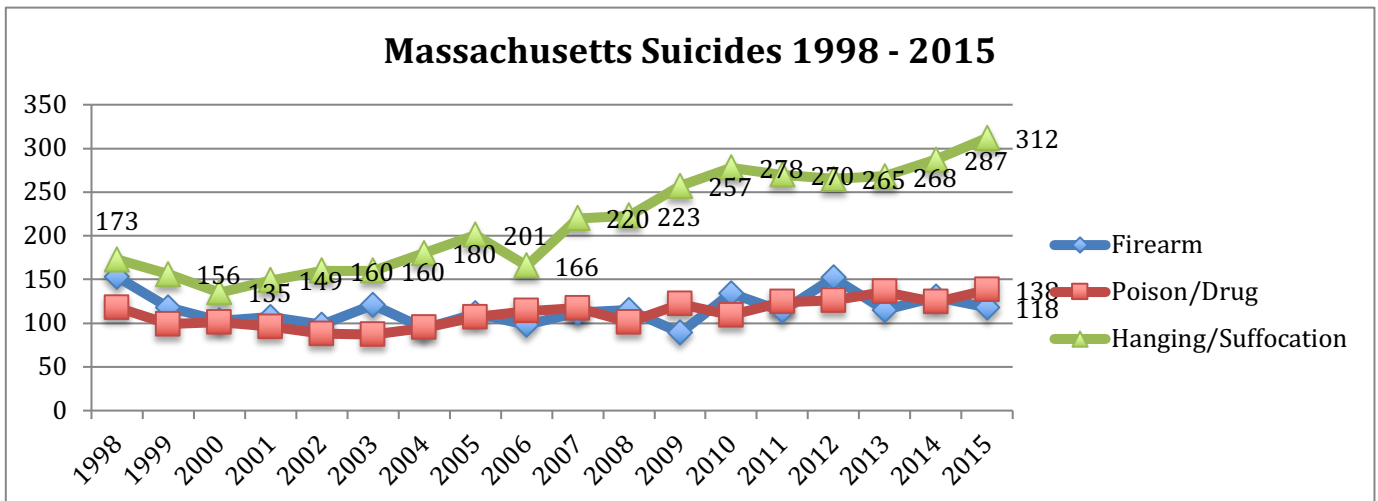
While there has been some reduction in gun related suicides, the results are somewhat sporadic. For instance in 1998 there were 153 gun related suicides and while for many years those numbers dropped it spiked back up to 152 in 2012. Before the State can celebrate any success, other means of suicide need to be examined to ensure people did not just simply shift to another means of suicide. The horrible conclusion is that they did and in even higher numbers.



When comparing suicides by other means within the Commonwealth, suicides by poison and guns seem to track together fairly well. (It should be noted that Poison/Drug numbers are recorded as intentional suicides, not overdoses that represent a vastly higher number.) This data would give evidence that the gun laws were not the reason for any temporary drop, but rather a statewide trend for these means.



A startling finding is beginning in the year 2000, just two years after the passage of Chapter 180, there was a drastic increase in suicides by hanging/suffocation. In the latest data from the ISP Reports from 2015, suicide by hanging and suffocation is now far more than guns, drugs and poison combined. Between the passage of Chapter 180 in 1998 and 2015, suicides in Massachusetts have increased some 28% using the top three means. This is another catastrophic failure of Massachusetts gun control. It also represents the State's continuing failure to address the human element.





## Violent Crime

While “violent crime”, as defined by the FBI, is not necessarily related to guns, it is a very good litmus test as to the overall safety of a state. As a result, we thought it very important to include it in this report. The narrative that Massachusetts’ gun laws are keeping its residents safer than the vast majority of other states is simply FALSE.

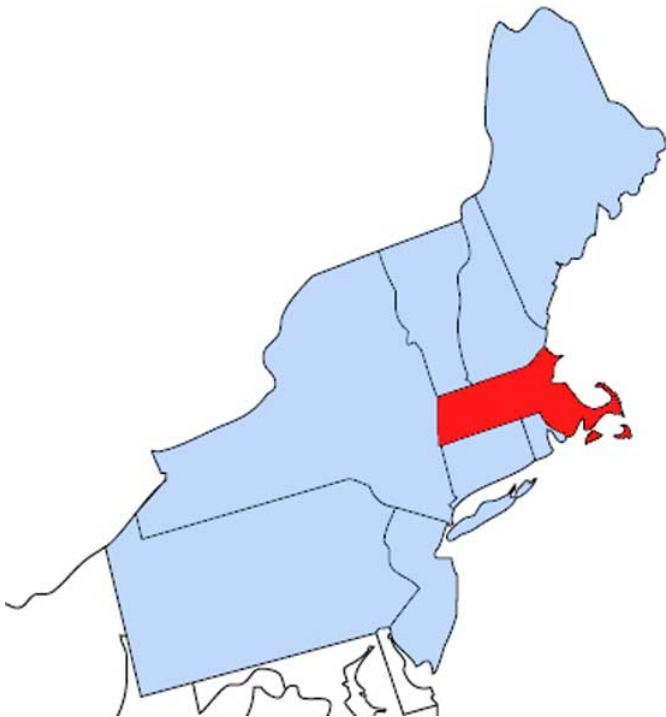
The FBI definition of “Violent Crime”: In the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, violent crime is composed of four major offenses, these include murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Violent crimes are defined in the UCR Program as those offenses which involve force or threat of force.

When compiling the data on violent crime, Maine is the safest state in the nation with a rating of 121.0 (per hundred thousand).

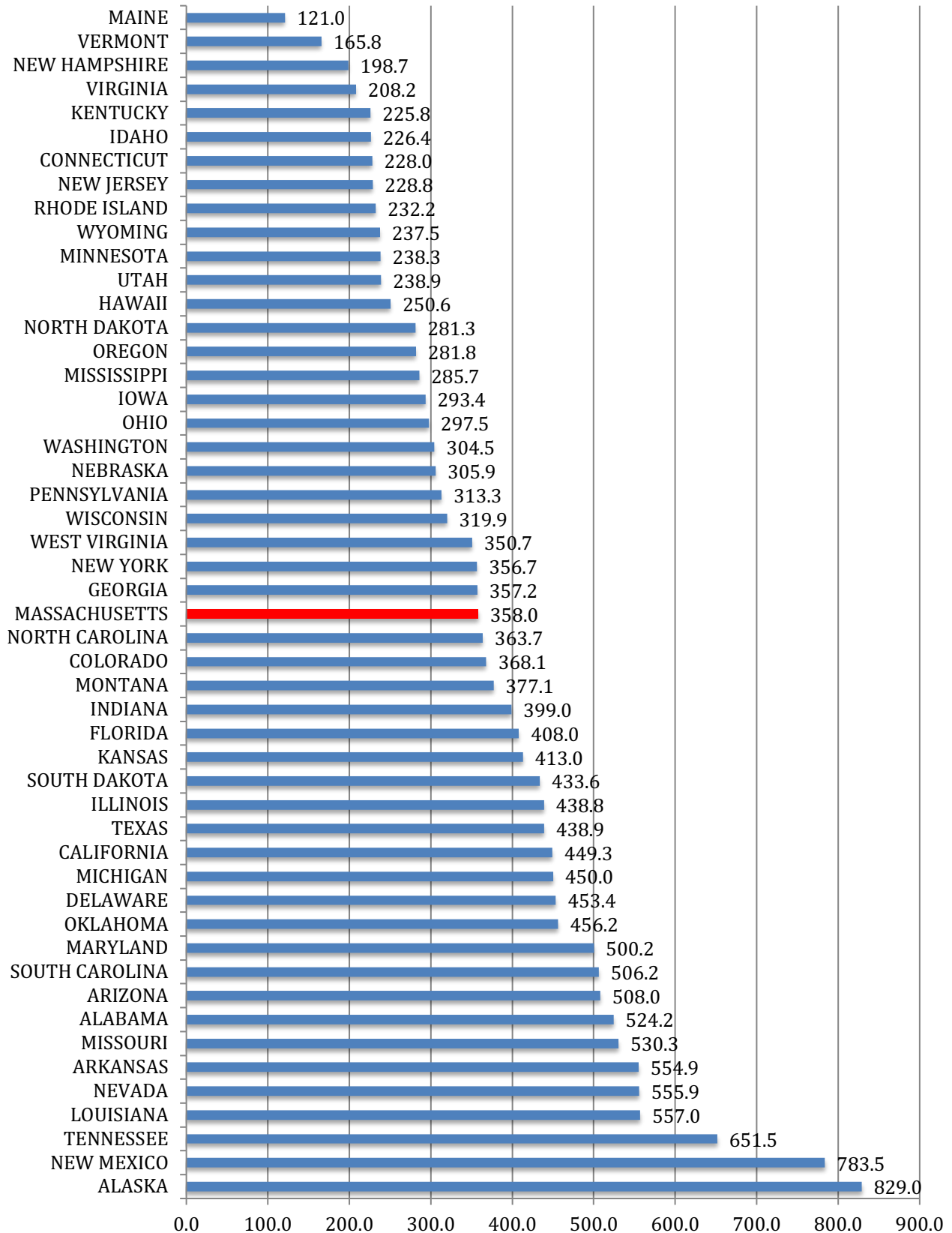
Vermont is second with 165.8 and New Hampshire comes in third with a 198.7.

In contrast, Massachusetts a violent crime rate of 358.0 putting it in 26<sup>th</sup> place when it comes to being a safe state. The Commonwealth’s violent crime rate is nearly three times that of Maine.

According to the violent crime data, the Commonwealth is arguably the most dangerous state in the northeastern United States. The states in our region that are safer, in order are: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and New York.



# Violent Crime Rate



## Conclusion

After reviewing all of the data provided to us by our government sources the only conclusion that can be logically reached is that Massachusetts gun laws have been, and continue to be, an abject failure in all three categories.

Firearm Safety (Accidental Deaths) – Nearly two decades of data from the state has proven that there has been no reduction in gun related accidental deaths. This is in part because statistically there was not an issue in the first place.

Criminal Use of Firearms (Murder & Assaults) – In comparing both state and national data, Massachusetts gun related murders are up approximately 30% over the 1998 numbers. This represents a failure of the laws to keep citizens safer.

Suicides – While there was a slight drop in firearm related suicides for a few years, that drop paralleled a similar decline in suicides by poisons. As a result, the data shows there was no correlation with the new gun laws and any decline. Further evidence is there was vast increase in suicides from hanging/suffocation in the Commonwealth. This is further proof that because the state focused on the thing and not the human criminal element, suicides increased drastically.

The passage of Chapter 180, and subsequent laws, caused hundreds of thousands of people to lose their civil rights or have them unreasonably restricted. Lawful gun owners have been persecuted, prosecuted and beaten down for no justifiable reason. The gun laws on whole are so complex and convoluted that the government, including law enforcement, does not understand them. In general these laws have been, and likely will continue to be, a failure on every level. Even Boston Mayor Walsh has said that Massachusetts gun laws are ineffective. The idea that Massachusetts' gun laws have been a success is a false and dangerous narrative. Dangerous because people are falsely being led to believe that the Commonwealth's gun laws are keeping them safe. Because of that, citizens continue to suffer from increasing crime.

**#EndLiesSaveLives**