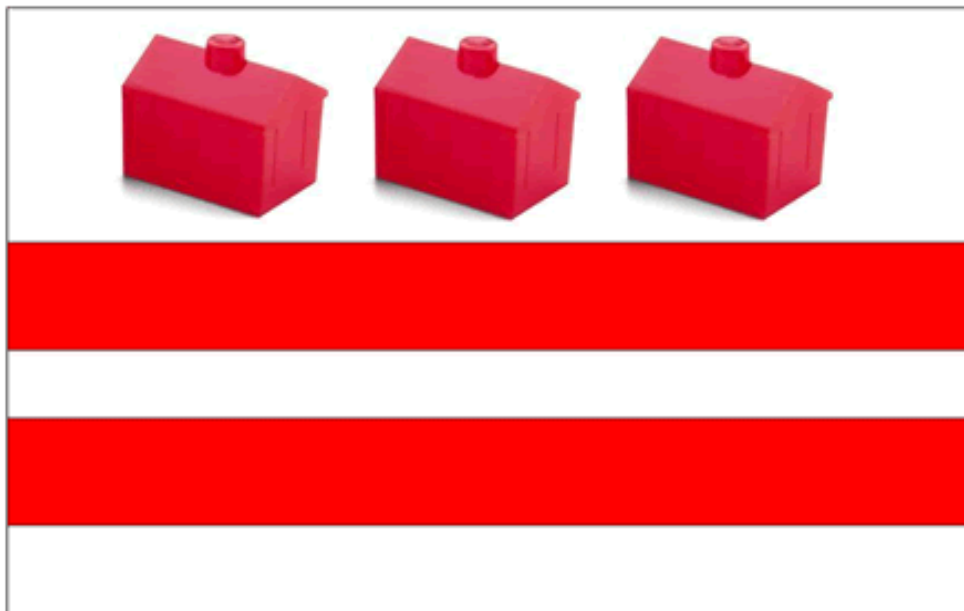


# Safe at Home

How D.C.'s Gun Laws Save Children's Lives



Violence Policy Center

## Introduction

The District of Columbia has some of the most stringent gun laws in the nation. In an effort to appease the gun lobby, Congressional opponents of firearm regulation have introduced legislation in the United States Senate (S. 1082) and House (H.R. 1288) to repeal the District of Columbia's longstanding laws banning the sale and possession of handguns and assault weapons.

Yet statistics show that the District's strict gun laws save lives by keeping guns out of the homes of District residents. Compared to the 50 states, children and youth in the District have virtually escaped the plague of youth suicide that afflicts the rest of the country. If the laws that prevent handguns and assault weapons from being commonplace in District homes are repealed, children and youth will be among the first to pay the deadly price.<sup>1</sup>

### Strict Gun Laws Help Prevent Youth Suicide in the District

Guns kept in the home escalate the risk of suicide, particularly among children and youth. According to the Surgeon General's *Call to Action to Prevent Suicide 1999*, the rate of suicide among those 10 to 14 years of age is reported as having increased by 100 percent from 1980 through 1996. The availability of firearms is often cited as a significant risk factor for youth suicide.<sup>2</sup>

Statistics show that children and youth in states with gun laws weaker than the District's are more likely to commit suicide with a gun than are children and youth in D.C. ***In fact, for the years 2000 through 2002, no child 16 years of age or younger in the District of Columbia was the victim of firearm suicide.*** In addition, there were ***no suicides by any other means*** by District youth in this age group.

Meanwhile, children and youth in states where guns in the home are more common killed themselves at alarming rates. The rates of youth suicide in the home states of many of the proponents of repealing the District of Columbia's gun laws are not only much higher than the District's rate of zero, but also exceed the national average of 0.45 per 100,000 as seen in the following chart.

---

<sup>1</sup> Contrary to the assertions of the gun lobby, it is legal to own sporting rifles and shotguns in the District of Columbia as long as they are registered and kept locked. D.C. Code §§7-2502.01, 7-2502.02, 7-2507.02.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, David Hemenway, "Private Guns, Public Health," University of Michigan Press, 2004, pp. 35-45.

**Firearm Suicide Deaths and Rates Among Children and Youth 16 Years of Age and Younger, 2000 Through 2002**  
**Ranked by Rate (Per 100,000 Population)**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Deaths</b>	<b>Rate</b>
1	Alaska	14	2.61
2	Montana	15	2.40
3 (tie)	Idaho	15	1.43
3 (tie)	Wyoming	5	1.43
5	North Dakota	5	1.16
6	Nebraska	14	1.12
7	South Dakota	6	1.07
8	Utah	21	1.02
9	New Mexico	14	0.98
10	Colorado	28	0.88
11	Mississippi	18	0.83
12	Minnesota	29	0.81
13	Iowa	16	0.79
14	Delaware	4	0.73
15	Oklahoma	18	0.72
16	Arkansas	13	0.68
17	Oregon	16	0.67
18 (tie)	West Virginia	7	0.63
18 (tie)	Wisconsin	24	0.63
20 (tie)	Indiana	26	0.58
20 (tie)	Missouri	23	0.58
20 (tie)	Tennessee	23	0.58
23 (tie)	Alabama	18	0.57
23 (tie)	Kentucky	16	0.57
23 (tie)	New Hampshire	5	0.57

<b>Rank</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Deaths</b>	<b>Rate</b>
26	Kansas	11	0.55
27	Virginia	27	0.54
28 (tie)	Michigan	39	0.53
28 (tie)	Texas	91	0.53
30	Washington	22	0.52
31 (tie)	Georgia	30	0.48
31 (tie)	Maine	4	0.48
33	Arizona	19	0.47
34	Nevada	7	0.45
35 (tie)	Louisiana	15	0.44
35 (tie)	Pennsylvania	36	0.44
37	South Carolina	12	0.42
38	North Carolina	23	0.40
39	Maryland	15	0.39
40	Florida	39	0.37
41	Ohio	26	0.32
42	Vermont	1	0.25
43	Illinois	21	0.23
44	California	56	0.21
45	New Jersey	10	0.17
46	New York	20	0.15
47	Rhode Island	1	0.14
48	Hawaii	1	0.12
49	Connecticut	2	0.08
50	Massachusetts	2	0.05
51	District of Columbia	0	0.00
	<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>0.45</b>

**Source:** National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, WISQARS database.

## Conclusion

Laws that keep guns out of the home play a significant role in preventing youth suicide. Repeal of the District of Columbia's landmark ban on handguns and assault weapons can only increase the risk that D.C. children and youth will become the victims of suicide.

\* \* \*

*For more information, please visit the Violence Policy Center's website [www.vpc.org](http://www.vpc.org) and [www.handgunfreedc.org](http://www.handgunfreedc.org), the VPC's web site to aid city-wide efforts to stop Congressional repeal of the District of Columbia's gun laws. This site contains background information on efforts to repeal D.C.'s gun laws, information on the ban's effectiveness, and a downloadable placard to be displayed in the windows of homes and businesses that reads, "Keep the DC Handgun Ban. If the U.S. Capitol Can be Handgun Free, Why Can't DC?" The Violence Policy Center is a national non-profit educational organization working to reduce gun death and injury.*

**The Violence Policy Center** (VPC) is a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on firearms violence and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, advocates, and the general public. The Center examines the role of firearms in America, analyzes trends and patterns in firearms violence, and works to develop policies to reduce gun-related death and injury. This report was authored by VPC Policy Analyst Marty Langley and VPC Legislative Director Kristen Rand. This report was funded in part with the support of The Herb Block Foundation, The David Bohnett Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Past studies released by the VPC include:

- *When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2002 Homicide Data* (September 2004)
- *The Threat Posed to Helicopters by 50 Caliber Anti-Armor Sniper Rifles* (August 2004)
- *United States of Assault Weapons: Gunmakers Evading the Federal Assault Weapons Ban* (July 2004)
- *Vest Buster: The .500 Smith & Wesson Magnum—The Gun Industry's Latest Challenge to Law Enforcement Body Armor* (June 2004)
- *A Further Examination of Data Contained in the Study "On Target" Regarding Effects of the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban* (April 2004)
- *Really Big Guns: Even Bigger Lies* (March 2004)
- *Illinois: Land of Post-Ban Assault Weapons* (March 2004)
- *Bullet Hoses—Semiautomatic Assault Weapons: What Are They? What's So Bad About Them?* (May 2003)
- *"Officer Down"—Assault Weapons and the War on Law Enforcement* (May 2003)
- *Firearms Production in America 2002 Edition—A Listing of Firearm Manufacturers in America with Production Histories Broken Out by Firearm Type and Caliber* (March 2003)
- *"Just Like Bird Hunting"—The Threat to Civil Aviation from 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (January 2003)
- *Sitting Ducks—The Threat to the Chemical and Refinery Industry from 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (August 2002)
- *License to Kill IV: More Guns, More Crime* (June 2002)
- *American Roulette: The Untold Story of Murder-Suicide in the United States* (April 2002)
- *The U.S. Gun Industry and Others Unknown—Evidence Debunking the Gun Industry's Claim that Osama bin Laden Got His 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles from the U.S. Afghan-Aid Program* (February 2002)
- *"A .22 for Christmas"—How the Gun Industry Designs and Markets Firearms for Children and Youth* (December 2001)
- *Kids in the Line of Fire: Children, Handguns, and Homicide* (November 2001)
- *Unintended Consequences: Pro-Handgun Experts Prove That Handguns Are a Dangerous Choice For Self-Defense* (November 2001)
- *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, Other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (October 2001)
- *Shot Full of Holes: Deconstructing John Ashcroft's Second Amendment* (July 2001)
- *Hispanics and Firearms Violence* (May 2001)
- *Where'd They Get Their Guns?—An Analysis of the Firearms Used in High-Profile Shootings, 1963 to 2001* (April 2001)
- *A Deadly Myth: Women, Handguns, and Self-Defense* (January 2001)
- *Handgun Licensing and Registration: What it Can and Cannot Do* (September 2000)
- *Pocket Rockets: The Gun Industry's Sale of Increased Killing Power* (July 2000)
- *Guns For Felons: How the NRA Works to Rearm Criminals* (March 2000)
- *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999)
- *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence* (Revised, October 1997)

Violence Policy Center, 1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Suite 1014, Washington, DC 20036  
202-822-8200 phone, 202-822-8205 fax, [www.vpc.org](http://www.vpc.org) web