

## GUN VIOLENCE AND BACKGROUND CHECKS IN MAINE

Support for the Second Amendment goes hand in hand with keeping guns away from criminals and other dangerous people. But loopholes in the law make it easy for dangerous people in Maine to get guns, resulting in needless violence—from deadly domestic abuse to suicide and school shootings. Research shows that common-sense public safety laws reduce gun violence and save lives. This fact-sheet brings together the findings of Everytown’s original investigations and analyses of relevant law enforcement and public health data to illuminate trends in gun violence and crime in Maine.

### THE TOLL OF GUN VIOLENCE

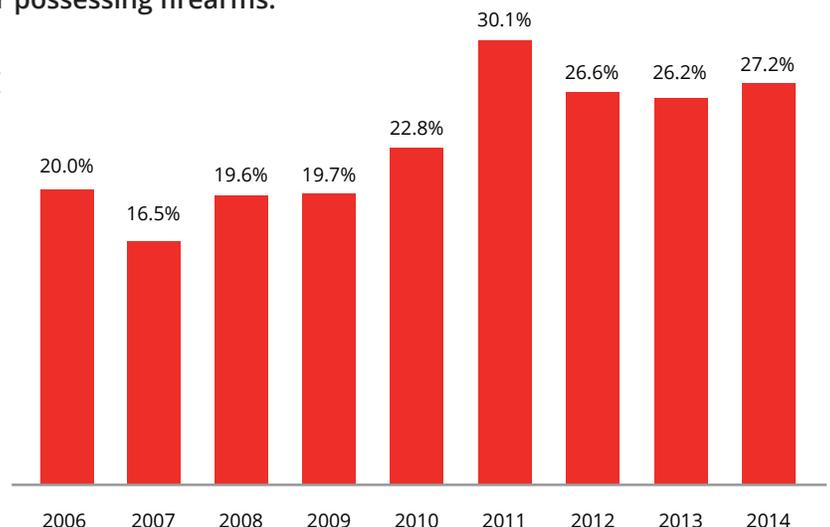
In the last decade of available data, 132 Maine residents were murdered with guns, and an additional 1,040 died in firearm suicides.<sup>1</sup> More than half of suicides in the state (53 percent) were committed with guns.<sup>2</sup>

A large number of Maine guns end up in the wrong hands and are used in crimes in Maine and elsewhere in the region. **Between 2006 and 2014, the share of Maine crime guns that were likely trafficked rose more than 36 percent.** A gun is considered to have been likely trafficked if it has a short “time-to-crime,” meaning it was recovered by law enforcement at a crime scene less than two years after its original sale by a licensed dealer. **In 2014, more than one in four guns recovered from Maine crime scenes (27 percent) had a short time-to-crime.**<sup>3</sup>

Maine guns also end up in the hands of criminals in other states. **Between 2006 and 2014, at least 1,510 guns originally purchased in Maine were recovered by law enforcement in other states.**<sup>4</sup> And a recent analysis of guns recovered at crime scenes in Boston found that Maine was the second-to-largest out-of-state source, supplying nearly 1 in 10 of the successfully traced guns.<sup>5</sup>

Illegal guns pose a particular threat to police. **Of law enforcement officers shot to death nationwide in 2013, 52 percent were killed by individuals who were prohibited from either purchasing or possessing firearms.**<sup>6</sup>

### AN INCREASING SHARE OF CRIME GUNS IN MAINE ARE LIKELY TRAFFICKED



## GUNS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MAINE

## LOOPHOLES IN GUN LAWS UNDERMINE PUBLIC SAFETY

There is a deadly relationship between guns and domestic violence in Maine. **In 42 percent of all gun homicides in Maine in 2013, the perpetrator was a former or current intimate partner or family member of the victim.**<sup>7</sup>

Domestic abusers who are prohibited from having guns under federal law are actively trying to purchase guns in Maine. In the last five years, 22 percent of people who failed background checks at licensed dealers in the state were blocked due to a history of domestic violence, nearly double the national rate of 12 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Certain dangerous people are prohibited from having guns including felons, convicted domestic abusers, and the severely mentally ill. For 20 years, federal law has required licensed gun dealers to conduct a background check for every firearm purchase to ensure they do not sell guns to these prohibited people. **In Maine alone, the background check system has blocked at least 5,501 gun sales, including 2,790 sales to felons and 1,202 to domestic abusers.**<sup>9</sup>

Background checks are the most systematic way to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and other dangerous people. But under current law, background checks are only required for gun sales at licensed dealers. Nationwide each year, millions of gun transfers take place between unlicensed sellers and buyers—often at gun shows or through anonymous online transactions—and are not subject to a background check.<sup>10</sup>

This loophole in our background checks system is especially dangerous considering the vast, virtual gun show that now exists on the internet. Dozens of websites—like Armslist.com, the self-described Craigslist for guns—each host tens of thousands of ads for unlicensed gun sales and provides a forum for strangers to connect and arrange offline gun transfers, just like Craigslist does for furniture sales and concert tickets. In less than two years, the online market experienced an almost sevenfold increase in the number of guns available, no background check required.<sup>11</sup>

Criminals are flocking to this loophole to arm themselves. An Everytown investigation in 2013 showed that 1 in 30 (3.3 percent) would-be buyers on Armslist have criminal records that prohibit them from buying guns under federal law.<sup>12</sup> In some states, that share of prohibited buyers is even higher: an Everytown investigation in Washington State found that 1 in 10 prospective buyers there had committed crimes that prohibited them from possessing guns, including individuals charged with rape, domestic abuse, robbery, and assaulting a police officer.<sup>13</sup> **With nearly 800,000 ads posted on the site each year, Armslist may put 25,000 guns into criminal hands each year.**<sup>14</sup>

MAINE BACKGROUND CHECK DENIALS, 1998-2014		
CRITERIA	TOTAL	SHARE
Convicted of a crime punishable by more than one year or a misdemeanor punishable by more than two years	2,790	51%
Misdemeanor Crime of Domestic Violence Conviction	872	16%
Fugitive from Justice	833	15%
Unlawful User/Addicted to a Controlled Substance	364	7%
Protection/Restraining Order	330	6%
State Prohibitor	105	2%
Adjudicated Mental Health	65	1%
Under Indictment	34	1%
Other (including Illegal/Unlawful Alien, Federally Denied Persons File, Dishonorable Discharge, and Renounced U.S. Citizenship)	108	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,501</b>	

## BACKGROUND CHECKS SAVE LIVES

Expanding and strengthening the background check system is a proven way to prevent gun violence. In states that require a background check for all handgun sales, there are:

↓ **46% FEWER**  
women shot to death  
by intimate partners<sup>15</sup>

↓ **48% FEWER**  
law enforcement  
shot to death with  
handguns,<sup>16</sup> and

↓ **48% LESS**  
gun trafficking<sup>17</sup>

## PASS THE BACKGROUND CHECK INITIATIVE

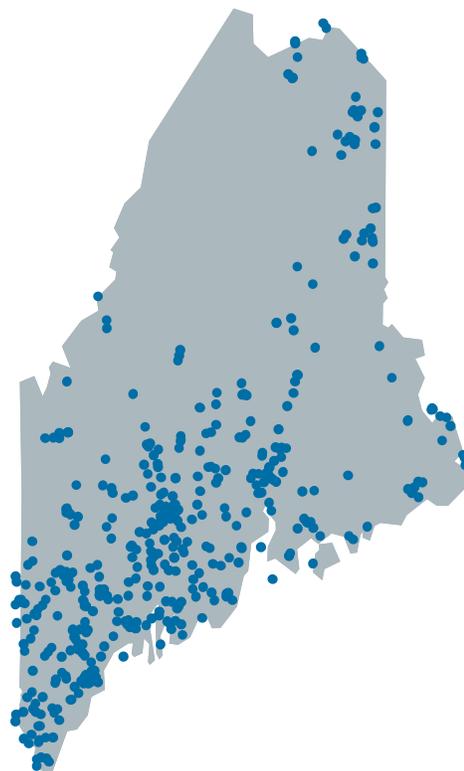
There is an effort underway to collect signatures to put a citizens initiative on the November 2016 ballot that would require a criminal background check for every gun sale, with reasonable exceptions for family transfers, hunting, and self-defense. The background check initiative would expand the existing system to make sure that everyone buying a gun in Maine passes a criminal background check, no matter where they buy the gun and no matter who sells it to them.

Meeting at a licensed gun dealer to complete a background check is easy.

**There are 468 federally licensed gun dealers in Maine<sup>18</sup>—more than the number of post offices<sup>19</sup>—and 98.5 percent of Maine residents live within 10 miles of one of them.<sup>20</sup>**

Eighty percent of Maine residents—as well as 78 percent of Maine gun owners—support requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales.<sup>21</sup>

### LICENSED GUN DEALERS IN MAINE



Paid for by Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund



**EVERYTOWN FOR GUN SAFETY** is the largest gun violence prevention organization in the country with more than 3 million supporters and more than 40,000 donors including moms, mayors, survivors, and everyday Americans who are fighting for public safety measures that respect the Second Amendment and help save lives. At the core of Everytown are **Mayors Against Illegal Guns** and **Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America**, a grassroots movement of American mothers founded the day after the Sandy Hook tragedy. Learn more at [www.everytown.org](http://www.everytown.org) and follow us @Everytown.

## NOTES

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2. Centers for Disease Control, "WISQARS" (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System)," available at <http://1.usa.gov/VtdKK9> (last accessed August 2015). Data is from 2004 to 2013.
3. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) trace data, available at: <http://1.usa.gov/1stn8HY>.
4. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) trace data, available at: <http://1.usa.gov/1stn8HY>.
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6. Everytown for Gun Safety, Law Enforcement Officers Shot to Death in 2013, May 2015, available at <http://every.tw/1gRSPqe>.
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15. Everytown for Gun Safety, *State Background Check Requirements and Rates of Domestic Violence Homicide*, January 2015, available at <http://every.tw/1VbgEbq>.
16. Everytown for Gun Safety, *State Background Check Requirements and Rates of Firearm Homicide Against Law Enforcement*, January 2015, available at <http://every.tw/1JVLG5n>.
17. Daniel W. Webster, Jon S. Vernick, and Maria T. Bulzacchelli, "Effects of State-Level Firearm Seller Accountability Policies on Firearm Trafficking," *Journal of Urban Health* 86, no. 4 (July 2009). To gauge gun trafficking, the authors measured the ratio of likely trafficked guns recovered from crime scenes to the total of guns recovered. A "likely trafficked gun" was defined as having been recovered at a crime scene and not in the possession of its original purchaser within one year of its last legal sale.
18. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, available at <http://1.usa.gov/1ps0dJa> (last accessed August 2015). Data is for type 1, 2, and 7 FFL licensees in the state of Maine.
19. "Post Offices by State," United States Postal Service, accessed August 26, 2015, <http://1.usa.gov/1PyRY4>.
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21. Global Strategy Group, live phone survey of 400 likely voters in Maine conducted July 16 – 19, 2015. Margin of error  $\pm 4.9\%$ . 80% of surveyed voters plan to vote YES on a ballot initiative requiring criminal background checks on all gun sales and transfers with certain exceptions. Support is broad and bipartisan, and supported by 78% of voters in gun-owning households.