



Violence Policy Center

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September 8, 2015

The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Cummings:

The Violence Policy Center (VPC) is a national non-profit organization that conducts research and policy development to reduce gun violence in America. The VPC strongly endorses the "Gun Trafficking Prevention Act of 2015." This bill addresses the illegal flow of guns into urban centers in the United States as well as the cross-border smuggling of firearms from the United States to Mexico, the Caribbean, and Canada. By honing in on the practice of "straw purchasing," the bill would stem the flow of illegal guns domestically and internationally.

"Straw purchasing" involves persons prohibited from possessing firearms recruiting people with clean records to purchase guns and then transfer them to prohibited buyers such as felons. In "Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Firearms Laws Against Illegal Traffickers" (June 2000), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) identified "straw purchasing" as "the most common channel in [firearm] trafficking investigations," noting, "Almost half of all the trafficking investigations involved straw purchasers."

The Violence Policy Center has examined more than 140 federal gun prosecutions from 2007 to the present involving high-volume gun trafficking to Mexico and other Latin American countries and found that the majority of those cases involved international gun traffickers using "straw purchasers," who are often paid, to acquire guns in the United States. The vast majority of the guns involved were assault weapons.

The bottom line is that guns that are acquired through "straw purchases" are being used to kill Americans every day, particularly in large cities such as Chicago, Baltimore, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C. At the same time, guns obtained using this practice are driving drug-related killings in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Canada.

Currently, there is no federal statute that directly outlaws "straw purchasing," forcing prosecutors to rely on laws prohibiting making false statements on the federal form that gun buyers fill out. This makes such cases very difficult to prove in court. It is no wonder the practice is so common when "straw buyers" know the chances of prosecution is low.

The “Gun Trafficking Prevention Act” would address this gaping hole in federal law by creating a new section in the criminal code to address gun trafficking. The bill would modernize federal law by directly addressing the practice most commonly used to traffic illegal guns. The importance of this change cannot be overstated—it is simply fundamental to stopping illegal gun trafficking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "KRAND", written in a cursive style.

Kristen Rand
Legislative Director
Violence Policy Center