

July 18, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Shaheen, and Ranking Member Moran:

We respectfully request that the Senate Committee on Appropriations provide full funding for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) for Fiscal Year 2025 to further protect the public from violent crime—which is made all the more violent when firearms are involved—and to assist ATF’s state and local law enforcement partners do the same. ATF, as the only federal agency solely dedicated to reducing violent crime and gun violence, plays a critical role in keeping Americans safe. However, in March, Congress enacted the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, and slashed nearly \$50 million from ATF—compromising ATF’s mission to protect Americans from violent crime.

House Republicans now want to slash even more. On July 9, 2024, the House Committee on Appropriations passed legislation that would cut nearly \$200 million more from ATF in Fiscal Year 2025—putting communities in more danger as well as law enforcement. We urge the Senate Committee on Appropriations to oppose these dangerous cuts to ATF and to ensure that ATF has the full funding it needs to protect the public.

The legislative scheme to defund ATF echoes calls from extremists in and outside of Congress to abolish ATF altogether. It is an attack on the more than 5,000 dedicated agents, investigators, and personnel at ATF across 25 field divisions and more than 200 local offices who protect and serve our country and our communities. In addition, it undermines ATF’s state and local law enforcement partners—force multipliers—who depend on ATF, including ATF’s National Tracing Center and National Integrated Ballistics Information Network, to investigate and solve gun crimes in their own jurisdictions.

ATF has long been under-funded and under-resourced, and the cuts that Congress exacted in March have required ATF to stretch even more with even less. For instance, ATF has stopped

recruiting and training new agents who are on the frontlines in our fight to stop violent crime and gun violence. To slash even more from ATF now would be catastrophic to public safety.

Impacts of Funding Cuts to ATF

- The proposed cuts would make it more difficult to detect and dismantle firearm trafficking channels that cross state lines and international borders, including the channels that allow .50-caliber rifles that can pierce armor, vehicles, and helicopters to be trafficked to cartels in Mexico who use them to facilitate the illegal drug trade and in organized crime.
 - ATF conducted 7,779 trafficking investigations in which nearly 230,000 firearms were trafficked between 2017 and 2021.¹ Georgia and Arizona accounted for the largest percentage of cases involving interstate trafficking, and Mexico was identified as the “most prevalent market country” involving international trafficking.²
- The proposed cuts would make it more difficult to stop straw purchasers and unlicensed gun sellers alike from funneling firearms to prohibited persons like convicted felons and domestic abusers who cannot pass a background check.
 - Pursuant to the new federal criminal statutes created in the landmark Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, as of June 25, 2024, more than 520 defendants have been charged with straw purchasing and firearms trafficking. In addition, between Fiscal Year 2021 and Fiscal Year 2023, there has been a 60% increase in the number of defendants charged with engaging in the business of importing, manufacturing, or dealing in firearms without a license.³
- The proposed cuts would make it more difficult to regulate products like untraceable ghost guns that continue to turn up at crime scenes and arm braces that turn pistols into the same kind of assault weapons that have been used in numerous high-profile mass shootings.
 - The number of suspected ghost guns that law enforcement recovered and submitted to ATF for tracing increased from 1,629 in 2017 to 19,273 in 2021—more than 1000%.⁴ In 2022, law enforcement recovered 25,785.⁵
- The proposed cuts would make it more difficult to engage in rigorous oversight, including conducting dealer inspections and holding bad actors up and down the firearm supply chain accountable.

¹ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment: Firearms Trafficking Investigations - Volume Three, Part V - Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked (Apr. 2024) at p. 7, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-v/download>.

² Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment: Firearms Trafficking Investigations - Volume Three, Part IV - Source-to-Market Type (Apr. 2024) at pp. 23-24, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-iv/download>.

³ Press Release, Dep’t of Justice, *Fact Sheet: Two Years of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act* (Jun. 25, 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/fact-sheet-two-years-bipartisan-safer-communities-act>.

⁴ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment: Crime Guns - Volume Two, Part III - Crime Guns Recovered and Traced Within the United States and Its Territories (Feb. 2023) at p. 5, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-v/download>.

⁵ Press Release, Dep’t of Justice, *Fact Sheet: Update on Justice Department’s Ongoing Efforts to Tackle Gun Violence* (Jun. 14, 2023), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/fact-sheet-update-justice-department-s-ongoing-efforts-tackle-gun-violence>.

- In Fiscal Year 2021, there were 729 active Industry Operations Investigators to oversee nearly 131,000 Federal Firearms Licensees. These investigators only conducted 6,660 compliance inspections in Fiscal Year 2021.⁶ At current inspection rates, FFLs can expect to be inspected less than once per decade.⁷

We implore the Senate Committee on Appropriations to stand firm against House Republicans' proposed cuts to ATF. Instead, the Committee should provide \$1.952 billion for Fiscal Year 2025—the amount ATF requires to meet the “increase in demand for ATF’s expertise and resources, including direct investigative response, enhanced regulatory oversight of firearm licensees, and support to law enforcement agencies.”⁸ It is critical that ATF be equipped with the funds, resources, and personnel to protect the public and keep communities safe.

Sincerely,

Monisha Henley
Senior Vice President for Government Affairs
Everytown for Gun Safety

Christian Heyne
Chief Officer, Policy and Programs
Brady

Vanessa Gonzalez
Vice President of Government & Political Affairs
GIFFORDS

Nick Wilson
Senior Director for Gun Violence Prevention
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⁶ Dep’t of Justice, Office of Inspector General, *Audit of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives’ Risk-Based Inspection Selection Processes and Administrative Actions Issued to Federal Firearms Licensees* (Apr. 2023) at pp. 3, 6, https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/23-062_0.pdf.

⁷ Everytown Research & Policy, *Inside the Gun Shop: Firearms Dealers and Their Impact* (July 6, 2023), <https://everytownresearch.org/report/firearms-dealers-and-their-impact/>.

⁸ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Fiscal Year 2025 Performance Budget, Congressional Submission, Salaries and Expenses (Feb. 2024) at pp. 1-2, https://www.justice.gov/d9/2024-03/atf_fy_2025_pb_narrative_final_3-6-2024_1.pdf.