

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 18, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairman Leahy,

As you prepare Fiscal Year 2018 appropriations bills, we urge you to eliminate harmful legislative provisions that inhibit the enforcement of existing gun laws and to prioritize funding for the agencies and programs that prevent and respond to gun crime.

More than 33,000 people in the United States die from guns each year. On average, 93 Americans are killed by a gun each day, and for every one person killed by a gun, two more are injured. The United States accounts for 46 percent of the combined population among developed countries, but represented 82 percent of the gun deaths in these countries. And our gun homicide rate is 25 times higher than that of other developed countries. Additionally, nearly 62 percent of gun deaths are suicides. Since 1968, there have been more gun-related deaths in America than all war-related deaths since the Revolutionary War.

Those who object to the passage of stronger gun laws frequently claim that new legislation is unnecessary and that we simply need to better enforce existing laws. In order to effectively do so, however, the agencies whose mission it is to prevent and respond to gun violence, such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Office of Justice Programs, must be fully funded and staffed and not hamstrung by legislative provisions that chip away at their ability to actually enforce existing laws.

Therefore, we ask that you prioritize the following items in your Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 appropriations bills:

### **Rescission of Harmful Gun Policy Riders**

We ask that you not include the annual policy riders that have prevented federal agencies from fully enforcing federal gun laws and from taking other actions to prevent gun violence. We also ask that you reject the inclusion of any new policy riders that would further limit the enforcement of existing laws. Finally, in instances where a rider has already been enshrined in permanent law, we ask that you include legislative language to rescind the rider.

There are approximately 20 riders that inhibit the federal government's efforts to address the causes of gun violence. These riders place arbitrary and crippling limits on the powers of Executive Branch departments and agencies that have been charged with enforcing existing gun laws and addressing gun violence in our society.

The limits placed on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) are particularly harmful. ATF's primary mission is to prevent the illegal possession and trafficking of firearms. However, as a result of annual and permanent appropriations riders, ATF cannot require gun dealers to conduct inventories to determine if any guns are lost or stolen; prevent certain types of assault weapons from entering the United States; computerize the records of gun dealers that have gone out of business; or release, in many instances, data on the origins of firearms recovered at crime scenes that might shed light on the connections between certain firearms and crime. Congress has further left the federal government unable to properly enforce firearms laws and oversee firearms dealers by preventing ATF from transferring any of its functions to other agencies.

### **Funding for ATF to Replace Retiring Special Agents and Inspectors**

We urge you to provide no less than \$1.258 billion (the FY17 enacted level) for ATF so that it can address the substantial number of special agents, inspectors, and other personnel who have retired or will soon be retiring.

These individuals play critical roles in ensuring that firearms dealers are able to receive required licenses and are complying with existing laws, investigating gun crimes, and helping to ensure that guns held by dealers are not lost or stolen. Despite the importance of these positions, ATF is still recovering from the FY

2013 hiring freeze caused by sequestration and faces a significant generational attrition wave. It is imperative that ATF have the funding it needs to hire special agents and inspectors to fill vacant positions, reverse devastating attrition trends, and properly enforce existing gun laws.

### **Funding for Other Programs to Prevent and Respond to Gun Violence**

A number of other programs play critical roles in the federal government's efforts to prevent and respond to gun violence. We respectfully request that you fund the following programs at the levels listed below:

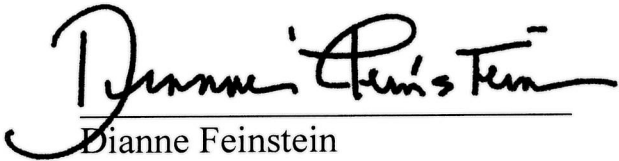
- \$50 million for the National Criminal History Improvement Program
- \$25 million for the NICS Improvement Program
- \$121.1 million for the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System
- \$36.2 million for the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network
- \$75 million for the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative
- \$15 million for the VALOR Initiative
- Sufficient funding to allow for timely notification of state and/or local law enforcement when a prospective gun purchaser lies on their application and fails a NICS background check.
- \$10 million for Gun Violence Prevention Research
- \$23.5 million for the National Violent Death Reporting System

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In order to keep our communities and families safe, it is critical that the federal agencies charged by Congress with preventing and responding to gun violence are fully funded and permitted to actually enforce the gun laws that have already been enacted. We urge you to draft FY 2018 appropriations bills that reflect those priorities.

Thank you for your attention to these important requests.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



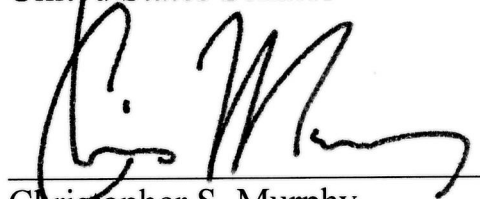
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



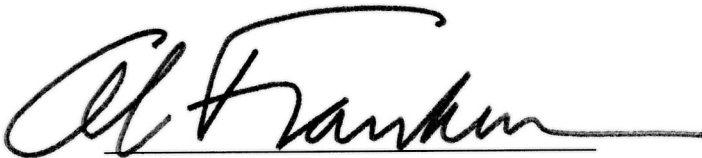
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



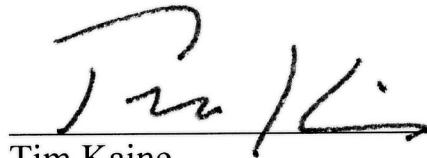
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator




Al Franken  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



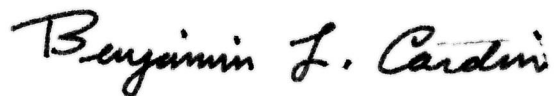
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



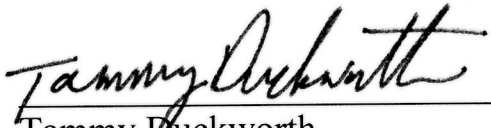
Tommy Baldwin  
United States Senator

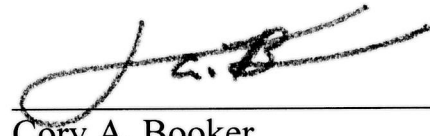


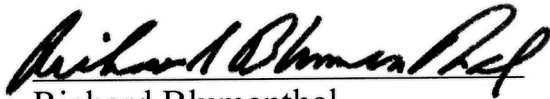
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator


  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

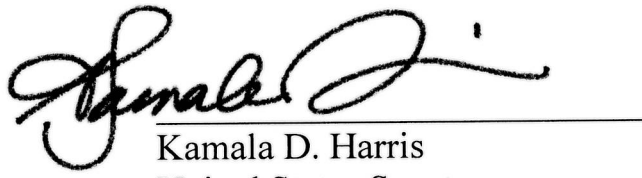
  
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator


  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

  
Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

  
Jack Reed  
United States Senator

  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

  
Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

  
Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Richard C. Shelby  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Roy Blunt

Chairman

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies

Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patty Murray

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and \  
Related Agencies

Senate Committee on Appropriations