

May 8, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chris Coons
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Vice Chairwoman Collins, Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Graham, Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chairman Diaz-Balart, and Ranking Member Lee:

Thank you for your efforts to advance the safety and security of America, and promote democracy globally. As you know, combating weapons trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean is critical to the region's economic success, our border security, and our strategic position in the hemisphere. As you determine priorities for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you include the following report language:

“Monitoring and combating the illegal sale and trafficking of weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean – Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall submit to the Senate Committee on Appropriations, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the Senate Committee on Commerce, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, the House Committee on Appropriations, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the House Committee on the Judiciary, and the House Committee on Homeland Security, a report on how the Department of State

coordinates with the Secretary of Commerce, the Executive Associate Director of Homeland Security Investigations, and the Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives to monitor and prevent the illegal export of firearms from the United States to unauthorized recipients in Latin America and the Caribbean; assess the impacts of illegal trafficking, increased violence, and corruption on democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean; and how the United States will enhance cooperation with Latin American and Caribbean countries to divert the illegal trafficking of weapons.”

This FY 2025 request would build on the SFOPS subcommittee’s commitment to curbing illicit trafficking operations in the Western Hemisphere.^{1,2} It would also expand that effort to monitor and combat weapons trafficking and study its effects on violence, economic opportunity, and corruption in the region.

Countering and preventing violence, illicit trafficking networks, and corruption driven by criminal organizations in Latin America has been identified, by the National Security Council, as a key factor in addressing the root causes of migration from the region to the United States.³ Recently, members of Congress have expressed reasonable concern regarding federal agencies’ efforts to prevent firearms trafficking from the United States into Latin America and the Caribbean.⁴ For instance, recent reports have shown that 70 percent of illegal guns recovered in Mexico are sourced from the United States.⁵ Transnational criminal organizations operating in Mexico then use these weapons to wage their drug war through violence, terrorism, and intimidation, often with little resistance from Mexican authorities.⁶

Similarly, half of all illegal guns present in Central America can be linked back to America.⁷ This rate approaches 80 percent in the Caribbean,⁸ and experts trace more than 90 percent of the firearms used in homicides in the Bahamas to the United States,⁹ as well as approximately 85 percent of firearms seized in Barbados.¹⁰ The U.S. Government Accountability Office also found that more than 40 percent of crime-related guns recovered in El Salvador, Honduras, and Belize originated in the United States.¹¹ Nearly

¹ Summary: FY2020 SFOPS Appropriations Bill, September 26, 2019, <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/news/minority/summary-fiscal-year-2020-state-foreign-operations-and-related-programs-appropriations-bill->; Summary: – FY2019 SFOPS Appropriations Bill, June 21, 2018, https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/news/minority/summary_--fy-2019-state-foreign-operations-and-related-programs-appropriations-bill.

² FY16 SFOPS Full Committee Markup Bill Summary, July 9, 2015, <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/news/minority/fy16-sfops-full-committee-markup-bill-summary>.

³ National Security Council. 2021. U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America. The White House.

⁴ Letter from Senator Grassley to Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, (Oct. 10, 2023) https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley_to_atf_-_firearms_trafficking.pdf; Letter from Senator Grassley to Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, (Dec. 14, 2023) https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley_to_atf_operation_southbound.pdf; Letter from Senator Grassley to the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice and State, as well as the Drug Enforcement Administration, Customs and Border Protection, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Homeland Security Investigations, U.S. Marshals Service and U.S. Postal Inspection Service, (Mar. 21, 2024) <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-digs-into-biden-admins-efforts-to-shut-down-successful-anti-arms-trafficking-operation>; Letter from Senator Grassley to Ambassador Salazar, (Feb. 1, 2024) https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley_to_ambassador_salazar_-_guns_to_mexico.pdf.

⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Disrupt Gun Smuggling into Mexico Would Benefit from Additional Data and Analysis.” GAO-21-322. February 22, 2021, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-322>.

⁶ Christine Murray, *How Mexico stymied America’s war on drugs*, Financial Times (Apr. 5, 2024) <https://www.ft.com/content/7c01d290-0deb-4b23-8e44-cd15eef560c2>.

⁷ Government Accountability Office, *supra* n.5.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ GAO, “Firearms Trafficking: More Information Is Needed to Inform U.S. Efforts in Central America.” GAO-22-104680. February 22, 2021, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104680.pdf>.

every country in the region is affected by illicitly trafficked guns. In Haiti, gangs recently wrestled control of over 80 percent of the Haitian capital city, armed largely with guns manufactured in the U.S.¹²

Experts suggest China, Russia, and Iran have taken advantage of the economic instability and corruption to increase their influence in Latin America and the Caribbean.^{13,14,15} The United States Congress must act swiftly in stemming the current flow of illicit guns from the U.S. to transnational criminal organizations who exploit government corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean. We urge you to support the inclusion of this report language in the FY 2025 SFOPS Appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you in the FY 2025 appropriations legislation to prevent illicit arms trafficking, promote stability throughout the region, and ensure the United States retains its strategic position supporting our Western Hemisphere partners.

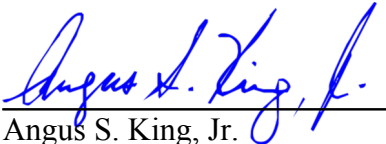
Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



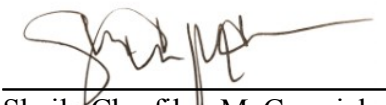
Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator



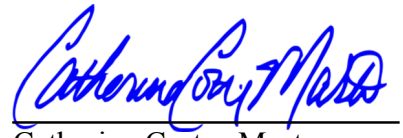
Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



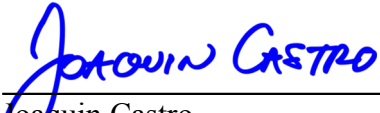
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

¹² Laughland, Oliver. "GUNS and Weapons Trafficked from US Fueling Haiti Gang Violence." The Guardian, March 14, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/14/haiti-gang-violence-us-guns-smuggling>.

¹³ Kine, Phelim. "Adm. Faller: China exploiting corruption in Latin America." Politico, August 12, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-china-watcher/2021/08/12/adm-faller-china-exploiting-corruption-in-latin-america-493948>.

¹⁴ Gurganus, Julia. "Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 3, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228>.

¹⁵ Swan, McKayla. "Foreign Authoritarian Influence in Latin America: Iran's Growing Reach." International Republican Institute, August 22, 2022. <https://www.iri.org/news/foreign-authoritarian-influence-in-latin-america-irans-growing-reach/>.



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



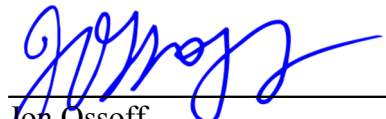
Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



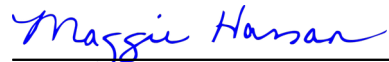
Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress



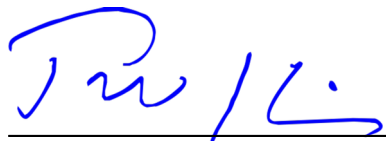
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



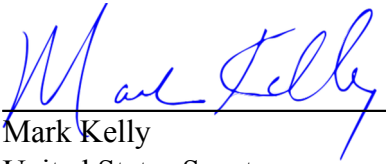
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



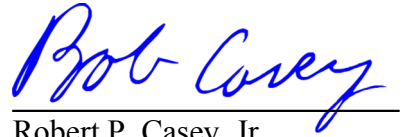
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



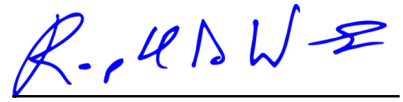
Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator