



STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

LETITIA JAMES  
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EXECUTIVE OFFICE

September 20, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Schumer, Leader Jeffries, and Leader McConnell,

On behalf of the States of New York, California, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont, and as our States' chief law enforcement officers, we write to emphasize the importance of legislative measures to combat arms trafficking to our neighbors in the Caribbean. In recent years, the number of guns smuggled from the United States to Caribbean nations has surged. Officials in the Caribbean estimate that roughly 90% of guns used in murders were bought in the United States and smuggled to Caribbean nations.<sup>1</sup> Reports indicate that the trafficking is mostly attributable to small-scale operators, who often send guns via cargo shipping companies.<sup>2</sup> These traffickers are aided—whether knowingly or unknowingly—by gun dealers in this country who sell to straw purchasers (that is, people who are purchasing guns for others).

The result of this steady flow of guns has been to increase gun violence in the region.<sup>3</sup> For instance, a 2023 United Nations report indicated that the United States has been a “principal source of firearms and munitions in Haiti,”<sup>4</sup> a conclusion consistent with reports from the U.S. Department

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<sup>1</sup> David Kocieniewski & Monte Reel, *In 'War on Guns,' Caribbean Allies Ask Which Side the US is On*, Bloomberg, Jan. 17, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Morland, *Caribbean armed violence fueled by small-scale gun traffickers, report says*, Reuters, Apr. 26, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Anne-Severine Fabre, Nicolas Florquin, Aaron Karp, and Matt Schroeder, *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study* (2023).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Haiti's criminal markets: mapping trends in firearms and drug trafficking* (2023).

of Homeland Security.<sup>5</sup> The consequences, at a time of deteriorating security conditions and heightened violence, have been devastating: increased trafficking of firearms and drugs has benefited gangs and their backers and have made it more difficult for international agencies to provide life-saving humanitarian aid. Other countries across the Caribbean have noticed a similar increase in guns illegally trafficked from the United States.<sup>6</sup>

This flow of guns from the United States to the Caribbean has devastating effects in our neighbors and has contributed to high homicide rates. For example, Jamaica has a homicide rate of 53.3 per 100,000, which is currently the highest rate of countries with reliable statistics, and the Jamaican Security Ministry estimates that at least 200 guns are trafficked from the U.S. into the country each month.<sup>7</sup> The influx of guns fuels violent crime and, among other things, enables drug smuggling networks to proliferate with consequences felt here in the United States. It is not an exaggeration to say that overdoses in American communities are made possible in part by the trafficking of firearms from the United States to the Caribbean. Additionally, as violent crime increases in many Caribbean countries, more and more people will seek shelter in the United States. While we strongly believe that we must welcome those who flee violence and instability, we know that many refugees and asylum seekers wish that they could safely stay in their home countries and would do so but for fear of gun violence.

Earlier this year, the Caribbean Arms Trafficking Causes Harm (CATCH) Act, H.R. 7799 and S. 4067, which would require reporting from the Coordinator for Caribbean Firearms Prosecution, was introduced in both houses of Congress. This would be an important first step, and it is one that would give both States and the Federal government much-needed information about implementation of anti-trafficking measures with respect to the Caribbean. But more is needed.

We therefore urge you to consider ways in which the U.S. government can do more to address this illicit flow, including by:

- Ensuring that inspectors at our ports are given sufficient resources to inspect shipments being sent from the United States to countries in the Caribbean;
- Ensuring that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has sufficient funding to inspect federal firearms licensees that are responsible for a disproportionate number of firearms that are traced after having been used in crimes in countries in the Caribbean; and
- Requesting briefings from the United States Postal Service, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice about their ongoing efforts to interdict shipments of guns from the United States to countries in the Caribbean, with a focus on what additional resources and legal tools they need to accomplish this important task.

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<sup>5</sup> [US officials warn of uptick in weapons smuggled to Haiti](#), Associated Press, Aug. 17, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> David Kocieniewski & Monte Reel, [In 'War on Guns,' Caribbean Allies Ask Which Side the US is On](#), Bloomberg, Jan. 17, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

Each of our States has benefitted from our close ties to our Caribbean neighbors. Addressing the outbound flow of guns from our country is a service to our constituents, many of whom have ties to family and loved ones in the Caribbean. We know that you share our commitment to ending gun violence here and in the Caribbean, and look forward to discussing this important matter with you.

Very Truly Yours,



Letitia James  
Attorney General of New York



Rob Bonta  
Attorney General of California



William Tong  
Attorney General of Connecticut



Kathleen Jennings  
Attorney General of Delaware



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