



U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,
Firearms and Explosives

Public and Governmental Affairs

Washington, DC 20226

www.atf.gov

March 12, 2024

The Honorable Joni K. Ernst
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Ernst:

This responds to your letter to the Department of Justice (Department), dated August 23, 2022, regarding investigations of firearm straw purchasing conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). We apologize for the delay in responding to your letter.

As violent crime involving the use of firearms has increased, ATF has been on the front lines, working with our local, State, Tribal, and Federal partners to hold accountable those perpetuating violent crime. Every day, dedicated ATF Special Agents (SAs) and Industry Operations Investigators (IOIs) work tirelessly to identify, investigate, and bring to justice those who knowingly violate the law to provide criminals and other prohibited persons with firearms.

Firearms trafficking poses a unique threat to the safety of our communities. One method of firearms trafficking occurs when a person or organization employs individuals who can successfully complete a lawful firearm transfer to purchase firearms on behalf of the prohibited person or organization, commonly known as straw purchasing. Straw purchasing is prohibited under the Gun Control Act of 1968, 18 U.S.C. §§ 922(a)(6) and 932. One way of disrupting the supply lines of firearms used in violent crime is to disrupt straw purchasing—a tool enhanced by the passage of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.

ATF's investigations leverage several tools, such as its relationships with other law enforcement agencies, its crime gun intelligence centers, and other sources of information to identify potential straw purchasers. ATF SAs, often in concert with their law enforcement partners, may conduct voluntary interviews with individuals who have recently purchased multiple firearms in order to verify the information they provided and to ensure there are no indicators of firearms trafficking. While every straw purchasing investigation is different, ATF SAs will usually make interview determinations based on trafficking trends in their area. As you note in your letter, one form of these voluntary interviews, known as a "knock and talk," is a commonly employed law enforcement investigative technique. As affirmed by the Supreme Court, law enforcement officers may, without a warrant, "approach a home and knock" as part of an investigation. *See Florida v. Jardines*, 569 U.S. 1, 8 (2013) (citing *Kentucky v. King*, 563 U.S. 452 (2011)).

Crucially, in fiscal years 2022 and 2023, through ATF's proactive investigative efforts, ATF referred over 3,000 persons for prosecution for straw purchasing. This type of work accounts for a significant deterrence and violence prevention effort that benefits our communities.

We hope that this information is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact ATF's Legislative Affairs Division at (202) 648-8510 or atflegislativeaffairs@atf.gov if we may provide additional assistance regarding this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

Ann M. Vallandingham
Acting Assistant Director
Public and Governmental Affairs