



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

Mayor Adams, Comptroller Lander, Pension Trustees and Other Elected Leaders Call for Credit Card Companies to Improve Tracking of Gun Sales

BRIAN KAVANAGH August 31, 2022

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NEW YORK – New York City Mayor Eric Adams, New York City Comptroller Brad Lander, trustees of the New York City Employees' Retirement System, Teachers' Retirement System and Board of Education Retirement System, and elected leaders today called on American Express, MasterCard and Visa, three of the world's largest credit card companies, to support a proposal to establish a merchant category code (MCC) for gun and ammunition stores. The

creation of a new code would help financial institutions detect and report suspicious activity, such as unusually large purchases of firearms or ammunition, or purchases from multiple stores, that may be used for criminal purposes.

Credit card companies use a four-digit merchant category code to classify businesses by the types of goods and services sold. Merchant category codes are set by the International Organization on Standardization (ISO). Unique merchant category codes exist for grocery stores, sporting goods stores, bicycle shops, and many other retailers — but not for gun and ammunition stores. Proposals have been brought before the ISO to create a merchant category code for gun retailers, but American Express, MasterCard, and Visa have not supported the proposal.

The press conference, which comes ahead of a fall meeting of the ISO, highlighted the introduction of shareholder proposals by the three pension funds at [American Express](#) and [Mastercard](#) and requested transparency on the decisions made regarding merchant category codes for gun and ammunition stores. The three pension funds also sent a letter with the California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS) to [American Express](#), [Mastercard](#), and [Visa](#). The three pension funds own 667,200 thousand shares in American Express valued at approximately \$92.49 million; 1.1 million shares in MasterCard valued at approximately \$347.59 million; and 1.85 million shares in Visa valued at approximately \$363.86 million.

This announcement also follows a letter to MasterCard and American Express from 50 New York state legislators, spearheaded by New York State Senator Zellnor Myrie and New York State Assemblymember Chantel Jackson, calling for the creation of this code.

“When it comes to guns falling into the wrong hands, we must find upstream solutions before we’re faced with downstream consequences — because downstream consequences are lost lives,” said **Mayor Adams**. “When you buy an airline ticket or pay for your groceries,

your credit card company has a special code for those retailers. It's just commonsense that we have the same policies in place for gun and ammunition stores. I'm proud to join Comptroller Lander and our partners at the state level to call for this important policy change."

"Gun violence continues to ravage our nation and communities across our city. As fiduciaries, we have a responsibility to minimize risks of harm that could negatively impact the companies in our portfolio. Establishing a merchant category code to identify purchases from gun retailers could do just that, by helping to prevent gun crimes and saving lives," said **Comptroller Lander**. "Unfortunately, the credit card companies have failed to support this simple, practical, potentially lifesaving tool. The time has come for them to do so."

"We must fight for public safety through every tool at our disposal: reducing the flow of guns into our communities, working with police to take on crime, and demanding that businesses do their part. Communities could stop paying the price for gun violence if credit card companies did their part to categorize gun purchases and flag suspicious activity to law enforcement agencies. There are categories for nearly every purchase, but none for the multi-billion-dollar gun industry," said **New York State Attorney General Letitia James**. "These changes could save lives and go a long way in helping us combat gun violence. I am proud to stand with my partners in government to call on the largest credit card companies to step up and help us protect communities."

"Credit card companies already use merchant category codes for retailers from utilities to transportation to clothing — it's past time they also used them to specifically mark gun stores as well," said **New York City Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams**. "As trustees of the New York City Employees' Retirement System, we have invested in the big three credit card companies. We have a fiscal and moral responsibility to protect New Yorkers' safety and finances by urging these companies to exercise that same responsibility and implement

category codes to help detect suspicious purchases at gun and ammunition stores. Every illegal gun was legal at some point, and the usage of these codes would be instrumental in monitoring and tracking those legal gun sales as well as future gun trafficking.”

“Gun violence is a public health and safety crisis that demands a full-force response from every sector, including financial services. Credit card companies have the power to track suspicious spending patterns and can use a designated MCC to help save lives,” said **New York State Senator Zellnor Myrie**. “I applaud Comptroller Lander for leading this shareholder action to demand responsible leadership and a true public-private partnership to end gun violence.”

“Gun violence is a crisis that has been tearing apart too many families for far too long. We need to think creatively and act aggressively to address this scourge,” said **Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.** “The credit card companies have their role to play in this and must do their part to help combat gun violence and keep our families safe.”

“To prevent gun violence, we need more tools available to track the purchases of dangerous weapons,” said **State Senate Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris**. “Credit card companies must be part of the solution and I am pleased to support Senator Myrie and Comptroller Lander's effort to ensure a new merchant category code for firearms purchases.”

“As Rochester faces a gun violence epidemic, we need to ask wealthy transaction processing companies like American Express and Mastercard to do their part to keep our communities safe,” said **New York State Senator Samra Brouk**. “Merchant category codes for standalone firearm and ammunition stores would be an important tool for our law enforcement community as they work to keep weapons out of the hands of those posing life-threatening dangers to themselves and others.”

“I thank Mayor Eric Adams and Comptroller Brad Lander for lending their voices, and organizing other leaders in New York City, to call for Mastercard, American Express, and Visa to take this important, responsible step to improve the tracking of gun and ammunition sales,” said **New York State Senator Brian Kavanagh**. “This will be an effective tool in our efforts to prevent atrocities like mass shootings and reduce the recent surge in gun violence that has plagued many of our nation’s communities. We urge these companies to do their part to increase public safety.”

“Every step we take to reduce gun violence is a step in the right direction. When we deter illegal gun trafficking and identify warning signs of potential mass violence, we will be keeping our communities and schoolchildren safer,” said **New York State Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon**. “I’m proud to stand with my colleagues to urge financial institutions to do their part in preventing gun violence.”

“A merchant category code for gun stores could save lives by allowing financial institutions like Amalgamated Bank to report sales associated with black market activity and potential domestic terrorism. Creating this code is one step the financial industry can take to keep our communities safe from gun violence.,” said **Maura Keaney, first vice president, Amalgamated Bank**. “We applaud New York City pension fund trustees for demanding transparency from MasterCard and American Express. Their failure to act on our proposal only delayed the creation of this potentially life-saving tool and created shareholder risk from their ability to see something, but not say something.”

“Credit card companies have an obligation stop bad actors, including mass shooters and firearm traffickers, from exploiting their systems to buy the firearms and ammunition they need to cause unimaginable harm. I am grateful for the leadership of New York City Comptroller Brad Lander, Mayor Eric Adams and the Pension Trustees in pushing Visa, Mastercard, and American Express to play their part in building safer communities with

fewer guns,” said **Igor Volsky, founder and executive director, Guns Down America.**

“In order for banks to be able to recognize dangerous firearm purchasing trends – like a domestic extremist building up an arsenal — and report them to law enforcement, gun store purchases need a unique identifier,” said **John Feinblatt, president, Everytown for Gun Safety.**

“We’re proud to join with Comptroller Lander and New York City’s pension fund trustees in calling on American Express, Visa, Mastercard, and other major credit card companies to support this new identifier, so we can make sure their products aren’t used to put guns in the wrong hands.”

“If Visa, Mastercard, and American Express created a dedicated code for gun and ammunition purchases, it would be possible to detect and deter illegal gun trafficking, prevent mass shootings, and save lives,” said **Adam Skaggs, chief counsel and policy director, Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.** “Americans should be asking why these companies are blocking progress, and why they are not taking steps to address gun violence. It’s long past due that these companies offer answers.”

The trustees of the aforementioned systems are as follows:

New York City Employees’ Retirement System (NYCERS): Mayor Eric Adams’ Representative Preston Niblack (Chair); New York City Comptroller Brad Lander; New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams; Borough Presidents: Mark Levine (Manhattan), Donovan Richards (Queens), Antonio Reynoso (Brooklyn), Vito Fossella (Staten Island), and Vanessa L. Gibson (Bronx); Henry Garrido, executive director, District Council 37, AFSCME; Tony Utano, president, Transport Workers Union Local 100; and Gregory Floyd, president, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Local 237.

Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS): Mayor Eric Adams’ Appointee Bryan Berge; New York City

Comptroller Brad Lander; Chancellor's Representative, Benjamin Schanback, New York City Department of Education; and Debra Penny (Chair), Thomas Brown, and David Kazansky, all of the United Federation of Teachers.

Board of Education Retirement System (BERS): Schools Chancellor David C. Banks, Represented by Ben Schanback; New York City Comptroller Brad Lander's Representative Alison Hirsh; Mayoral: Vasthi Acosta, Marjorie Dienstag, Gregory Faulkner, Sheree Gibson, Dr. Angela Green, Kyle Kimball, Anthony Lopez, Alan Ong, Gladys Ward, and Karina Taveras; Thomas Sheppard (CEC); Geneal Chacon (Bronx), Tazin Azad (Brooklyn) and Kaliris Salas-Ramirez (Manhattan); and employee members John Maderich of the IUOE Local 891 and Donald Nesbit of District Council 37, Local 372.

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