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March 7, 2013

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson (FL)
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (FL)
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Saxby Chambliss (GA)
416 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson (GA)
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Robert Casey, Jr. (PA)
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Patrick Toomey (PA)
502 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham (SC)
290 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Tim Scott (SC)
167 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Tim Kaine (VA)
B40C Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Mark Warner (VA)
475 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators,

As a state legislator in New York, I write to you in strong support of legislative proposals pending in Congress to require background checks and record-keeping on all U.S. gun sales. The time for action is now. Thirty-three Americans fall victim to gun murder every day—in Connecticut elementary schools, in Colorado theatres, and right here in the five boroughs of New York City. We must do all we can to keep handguns and assault weapons out of criminal hands.

I was born and raised in the South Bronx, and have represented the area as an elected official for more than ten years. Never before have I witnessed so many young people getting shot and killed with such tragic frequency.

Eighty-five percent of the guns recovered in New York City originate outside of the state. According to the most recent federal statistics on crime related gun trace data, your five states are most responsible for flooding the streets of my city with guns from outside of New York.

This should come as no surprise. The weak gun laws in your five states make it easy for criminals to easily obtain the weapons they traffic into New York City. In 2009, our crime scenes were littered with 225 guns from Florida, 260 guns from Georgia, 256 guns from Pennsylvania, 224 guns from South Carolina, and 349 guns from Virginia.

Fortunately, you have the opportunity in the U.S. Congress to back common-sense federal gun policies that will reduce gun crime and gun trafficking while protecting the Second Amendment.

Require Background Checks on all Gun Sales

The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) has already stopped more than two million illegal gun transactions over the past two decades. But only licensed gun sales are subject to federal background checks. In most states, convicted criminals and domestic abusers can easily avoid these checks by purchasing from unlicensed private sellers. An estimated 6.6 million guns are privately sold or transferred every year in the U.S. These private sales proliferate on Internet sites and gun shows. Dangerous individuals can obtain guns in these venues with no paperwork and no questions asked.

Licensed gun dealers understand the importance of background checks and documentation. These checks block illegal sales to individuals who are prohibited by law from possessing guns. And if guns from their stores are later recovered in crimes, dealers can access sales records to help law enforcement track down and prosecute the offenders. Record-keeping provisions are necessary to make gun laws enforceable – both to ensure that buyers and sellers are complying with the law, and to pursue those individuals who choose to violate the law. Without legislation holding private sellers to the same standards, they will continue to play by their own rules, undermining efforts to curb gun trafficking into my community.

Protect the Bronx, Protect America

Taking the action described above will reduce the flow of illegal weapons. But this is not just about protecting my constituents here in the Bronx; it's about protecting your constituents as well. Gun violence is a national epidemic. In 2010, gun murder claimed 767 lives in Florida, 443 lives in Georgia, 501 lives in Pennsylvania, 229 lives in South California, and 271 lives in Virginia. We must no longer tolerate this bloodshed. We can stop gun criminals and gun traffickers from preying on our young people.

“No cede malis” is the Latin motto of the Bronx. It means “Do not give way to evil” and we have community leaders instilling that in our young people every day. But there is only so much that one borough or one town or one city can accomplish without the cooperation of legislators in Washington. For this reason, I ask you to do everything possible to keep guns out of the wrong hands, starting by supporting enforceable legislation to require background checks on all U.S. gun sales.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "José M. Serrano", with a stylized flourish at the end.

State Senator José M. Serrano