

LAW ENFORCEMENT COALITION

F O R C O M M O N S E N S E

September 11, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan and Leader Pelosi,

We write to you today as a coalition of law enforcement professionals who come together around a common cause: to urge our elected officials to take commonsense action to end the gun violence epidemic in the United States. In that vein, we write this letter to urge you to oppose the Sportsmen’s Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act (SHARE Act), H.R. 3668, as well as the Hearing Protection Act, H.R. 367/S. 59, all of which would remove firearm silencers from regulation under the National Firearms Act of 1934. These reckless proposals would make it significantly easier for criminals or individuals seeking to harm others to obtain these deadly firearms, making communities across the United States less safe.

Firearm silencers, also known as “suppressors,” are currently legal to purchase under federal law. Along with exceptionally dangerous weapons like machine guns and sawed-off shotguns, silencers are classified as “National Firearms Act weapons” or “NFA weapons.” These weapons are regulated under the National Firearms Act of 1934, which was enacted as citizens and law enforcement officers were being gunned down at record rates: to obtain an NFA weapon, an individual must submit an application to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) that includes a photo, fingerprints, and payment for a \$200 transfer tax. ATF conducts a thorough background check; once complete, the individual must register his or her silencer with ATF.

While the application process is currently backlogged due to ATF’s lack of resources and the massive increases in silencer applications in the past several years—over 457,000 silencers were registered between February 2016 and April 2017, making up over one-third of all silencers registered since the NFA’s implementation in 1934ⁱ—such steps are critical to ensuring that these deadly firearms to not fall in the hands of those who should not have them. Thanks to ATF’s extensive background check process, silencers are rarely used in crime. However, should silencers be removed from NFA regulation, over 1.3 million silencers currently registered with ATF would become easily available for purchase by individuals unable to pass a background check through unregulated private sales on the internet or at gun shows.ⁱⁱ

Existing loopholes in our gun laws already cause serious concern for law enforcement officers: in 2016, ambush-style killings of police officers killed at the highest rate in 20 years.ⁱⁱⁱ The proliferation of silencers would make such killings even easier, endangering both our peers in law enforcement and citizens in communities nationwide. While uncommon, shootings involving silencers are often assassination-style, and due to a silencer's ability to alter the sound of gunfire, bystanders are unlikely to recognize the explosion as a gunshot. Law enforcement's ability to respond to an event, locate an active shooter, and limit casualties would be hindered. The increased use of silencers would also decrease the effectiveness of gunshot detection systems currently in place in nearly 100 cities, which alert law enforcement to the specific sound of gunfire whether bystanders contact the police or not.

As longtime law enforcement professionals, we have seen the horrific results of dangerous weapons falling into the wrong hands. The deregulation of firearm silencers through the SHARE Act or the Hearing Protection Act would only make these results more common and often more fatal. We urge you to reject any reckless attempt to remove silencers from the NFA, including the SHARE Act and the Hearing Protection Act, and help us to keep American communities safe.

Sincerely,

Commissioner John Barbieri, Springfield Police Department, Springfield, MA
Commissioner Charles Ramsey (Ret.), Philadelphia Police Department, Philadelphia PA
Director B. Todd Jones (Ret.), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
Sheriff Mike Reese, Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, Multnomah County, OR
Sheriff Lupe Valdez, Dallas County Sheriff's Department, Dallas, TX
Chief Andrew Bidou, Vallejo Police Department, Vallejo, CA
Chief Jim Bueermann (Ret.), President, Police Foundation, Washington, DC
Chief Robert Champagne (Ret.), Peabody Police Department, Peabody, MA
Chief Louis Dekmar, LaGrange Police Department, LaGrange, GA
Chief Ivan Fossen (Ret.), Glenwood Police Department, Glenwood, MN
Chief Michael Gahagan, Caribou Police Department, Caribou, ME
Chief Jeffrey Hadley, Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety, Kalamazoo, MI
Chief Scott Knight, Chaska Police Department, Chaska, MN
Chief Ron Louie (Ret.), Hillsboro Police Department, Hillsboro, OR
Chief Chris Magnus, Tucson Police Department, Tucson, AZ
Chief James Moore, Rocky Mount Police Department, Rocky Mount, NC
Chief Kathleen O'Toole, Seattle Police Department, Seattle, WA
Chief Michael Sauschuck, Portland Police Department, Portland, ME
Chief Paul Schnell, Maplewood Police Department, Maplewood, MN
Chief Henry Stawinski, Prince George's County Police Department, Prince George's County, MD

ⁱ <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/undefined/firearms-commerce-united-states-annual-statistical-update-2017/download>;
<https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/2016-firearms-commerce-united-states/download>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/undefined/firearms-commerce-united-states-annual-statistical-update-2017/download>;

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.nleomf.org/newsroom/news-releases/2016-officer-fatalities-report-release.html>