April 11, 2022

Marvin Richardson  
Acting Director  
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives  
99 New York Avenue NE  
Washington DC 20226

Dear Acting Director Richardson:

Thank you for your work to keep our communities safe. We are writing to ask for your urgent attention to growing gun violence throughout the country, including the increased use of illegal machine gun conversion devices known as auto sears or switches.

In January 2022, a gunman shot three Houston police officers with a barrage of automatic gunfire using an auto sear that converted his semiautomatic pistol into an automatic weapon. These devices, which can allow weapons to fire at a rate of up to 1,200 bullets per minute, make shootings more deadly, make our law enforcement officers’ jobs more dangerous, and increase the risk that innocent bystanders could be injured or killed when such a volume of bullets is unleashed.

While federal authorities have announced charges against 19 individuals in the Houston area who have used auto sears to commit violent crimes, including murder, use of these dangerous modifications is becoming more common around the country. Just last week, a tragic shooting in Sacramento involving at least one gun that had been modified with an auto sear killed six people and wounded 12 others. Officials estimate at least 100 rounds were fired. In Washington, D.C., the number of guns with auto sears the Metropolitan Police have recovered has been steadily increasing, doubling from spring 2020 to spring 2021. And according to Fred Malinowski, special agent in charge of the Houston Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) office, the amount of guns modified with auto sears seized by law enforcement across the United States has quintupled since 2020, from 300 guns in 2020 to more than 1500 in 2021. ATF must do more to protect communities across the United States.

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1 Michelle Homer and Melissa Correa, “‘This Has to Stop’: 19 Houston-Area Suspects Charged in Federal Crackdown on Illegal Gun Switches.” Khou.com (Feb. 24, 2022). https://www.khou.com/article/news/crime/19-houston-suspects-arrested-federal-charges-gun-switches/285-445053bb-16ee-4a45-ab1a-556686c8ead9-0-text-The%20feds%20say%20the%20Glock%20can%20fire%202%20seconds.&text-02%20seconds.&text-HTOWN%20%E2%80%92s%20investigators%20are%20going%20after%20illegal%20mini%20machine%20guns.


Often, auto sears come from overseas. But even more troubling, according to Stephen Galloway, the ATF’s assistant special agent in charge for Los Angeles, law enforcement is recovering devices at crime scenes that are manufactured with a 3D printer at home or in machine shops.\(^5\)

Just three weeks ago, the New York City Police Department announced the arrest of a Brooklyn man for 3D printing gun parts, including auto sears, and assembling and selling ghost guns.\(^6\)

As you know, the National Firearms Act regulates machineguns as well as “any part designed and intended solely and exclusively, or combination of parts designed and intended, for use in converting a weapon into a machinegun.” (See 26 U.S.C. 5845(b).). ATF has previously issued rulings on auto sears that only regulated certain auto sears by the National Firearms Act; however, there are multiple avenues to acquire these parts and a growing willingness by the gun industry to market these products.\(^7\)

Less than one month after the three Houston police officers were wounded by a Glock with an auto sear, a major gun distributor posted a video on Twitter celebrating a Glock equipped with an auto sear.\(^8\)

We urge you to issue updated and explicit guidance on auto sears, put a stop to gun companies pushing the legal limits on these devices, and provide additional resources to help rid communities like ours of these dangerous devices.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working with you to make our communities safer for everyone.

Sincerely,

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

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Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

Dina Titus
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

André Carson
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