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Full Report Available at www.DemandAction.org/OnlineGunBuyers

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The bipartisan Mayors Against Illegal Guns coalition today announced the results of the first-ever national investigation into individual buyers with criminal records seeking to illegally acquire guns via online gun sales. The report concludes that thousands of people already barred by existing Federal law from purchasing guns are flocking to the Internet to evade background checks and acquire guns illegally, with no questions asked. The investigation – which examined online gun listings posted between February and May 2013 on the popular website Armslist.com – found that this single website could transfer more than 25,000 guns to individuals with criminal records just this year.

Because the investigation focused specifically on people who pro-actively posted to Armslist.com advertising their desire to purchase firearms, it only scratched the surface of the internet's vast illegal gun market. There are no Federal background check requirements to prevent such online sales, and the findings reveal that those who would normally be deterred by background checks at dealers are taking advantage of the digital private sale loophole. In fact, individuals seeking to purchase guns on Armslist.com are also nearly four times more likely to have criminal records than buyers at licensed dealers that require background checks. Mayors Against Illegal Guns Co-Chair and New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced the findings in a press conference at City Hall. The full report – "Felon Seeks Firearm, No Strings

Attached" – is available at
www.DemandAction.org/OnlineGunBuyers

"Today, we announced the first-ever national investigation into illegal online gun buyers, and the results are startling," said Mayor Bloomberg. "In the digital age, convicted felons, domestic abusers, and other dangerous people who are legally barred from buying guns can do so online with little more than a phone number or email address. As our investigation shows, thousands of criminals and other prohibited purchasers are doing just that. It's time for Washington to take immediate and critical steps – and get serious about this issue."

"Loopholes in our federal gun laws have taken a devastating toll on communities and neighborhoods across America," said Mayors Against Illegal Guns Co-Chair and Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino

. "Yet in April, a minority of U.S. senators blocked the common-sense legislation that would have closed these deadly loopholes by extending background checks to cover private sales in commercial settings – including online. It's time for our leaders in

Washington

to put public safety first and pass sensible gun laws that will help save lives."

With thousands of websites that offer firearms for sale, the Internet marketplace for guns is vast and growing. Over the last 20 months, the number of gun ads listed by private sellers on Armslist.com has expanded almost sevenfold, from 12,000 in December 2011 to 83,000 active ads in August 2013.[1] Current federal law only requires licensed firearms dealers – not private sellers – to conduct background checks, making this unregulated, online private market for guns particularly appealing to criminals and other prohibited purchasers.

Without conducting a background check, private sellers have no way of knowing whether they are selling guns to individuals who are legally barred from buying them. In 2011, a first-of-its-kind investigation by the City of New York found that 62 percent of private sellers agreed to sell guns to investigators who said they probably could not pass a background check.[2] The 2011 investigation highlighted just how easy it is for prohibited purchasers to buy guns, but since then there has been no measure of how many criminals are exploiting this loophole. The "Felon Seeks Firearm, No Strings Attached" report provides the first snapshot of this problem and how it's compromising public safety.

The Investigation

The vast majority of ads on sites like Armslist.com are posted by sellers, but would-be buyers can also post ads that describe the guns they seek, known as "want-to-buy" ads. To learn more about would-be gun buyers online, Mayors Against Illegal Guns reviewed a unique data set: the identifying information voluntarily provided by would-be gun buyers in want-to-buy ads that were publicly available on Armslist.com. Investigators "scraped" – a software technique for extracting online data – 13,298 want-to-buy ads for firearms posted on Armslist.com from February 11, 2013 to May 10, 2013, and examined them for identifying information. Unique phone numbers or email addresses were found in 1,430 of the ads. Using reverse lookup phone data, 607 of those identifiers could be linked to an individual living in the state where the ad was placed.

Investigators then conducted criminal record checks on each individual by searching court records in the areas where the person was known to have maintained a current or past address. Any felony convictions, domestic violence misdemeanors, bench warrants, or orders of protection that could be linked to the individual were subjected to a legal analysis to determine if they were prohibited from possessing guns under federal law. To ensure that matches between would-be gun buyers and criminal records were valid, investigators called the phone number posted in each ad to confirm the subscriber had placed the ad, and that their name and date of birth matched the criminal record.

The Results

The investigation found that:

- **Of the 607 identified would-be gun buyers, 1 in 30 had committed crimes that prohibited them from possessing a firearm.** [3]To put that in perspective, if 1 in 30 people on a Boeing 747 were on a terrorist watch list, the plane would have 22 suspected terrorists on it.[4]
- **Armslist will host 790,000 unique firearm ads this year, which means an estimated 25,000 guns could be transferred to individuals with criminal records on one website alone – just a corner of a sprawling online market place for firearms.** On an average day, more than 2,000 new gun ads are posted on Armslist.com.
- **Many of the prohibited buyers identified in the investigation had lengthy criminal histories that included recent violent crimes.** Their histories include charges of

aggravated assault with a firearm, illegal gun possession, domestic violence harassment, and robbery with a dangerous weapon.

- **The share of criminals purchasing guns on Armslist.com is nearly four times higher than the share attempting to purchase guns at licensed dealers.** In 2012, licensed dealers conducted 8,725,425 federal background checks and 76,260 of these potential sales – 0.87 percent – were blocked because the check revealed a history of crime or domestic violence.[5] This is compared to 3.3 percent of would-be buyers on Armslist who were prohibited purchasers because of their criminal history.

Recommendations

Based on the investigation's findings, the report recommends that Congress take action to close the deadly loophole that allows criminals to buy guns online without a background check. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF) and the websites hosting these gun marketplaces must do their part too.

- **Congress should pass legislation to require a background check for every commercial gun sale, including those facilitated by websites.** The existing background check system is efficient and effective, but limited because private sales remain exempt from this common-sense requirement. Bipartisan legislation under consideration by both chambers of Congress would enact this sensible reform.

- **ATF should improve enforcement of existing laws.** ATF should use all of the tools at its disposal to prevent illegal online gun sales, including by conducting undercover investigations of websites that sell guns, documenting when guns recovered from crimes were originally sold online, and offering online tutorials to train sellers and buyers about the laws governing online sales.

- **Websites should adopt tougher protocols to deter crime.** Online actors should meet the same public safety standards they are required to satisfy in the bricks-and-mortar marketplace. Websites that host gun ads can do so by demanding transparency from their sellers and buyers, flagging suspicious behavior, and taking reasonable steps to ensure they are not facilitating illegal gun sales to criminals.

About Mayors Against Illegal Guns

Since its creation in April 2006, Mayors Against Illegal Guns has grown from 15 members to more than 1,000 mayors from across the country. The coalition has more than 1.5 million grassroots supporters, making it the largest gun violence prevention advocacy organization in

the country. Co-chaired by
Bloomberg
Boston
Mayor
Thomas Menino

New York City Mayor Michael
and

, Mayors Against Illegal Guns has united the nation's mayors around these common goals: protecting communities by holding gun offenders accountable; demanding access to crime gun trace data that is critical to law enforcement efforts to combat gun trafficking; and working with legislators to fix weaknesses and loopholes in the law that make it far too easy for criminals and other dangerous people to get guns. Learn more at www.MayorsAgainstIllegalGuns.org

Contacts: Mayor Bloomberg's Press Office: 212-788-2958 Mayor Menino's Press Office: 617-635-4461

Alex Katz: akatz@maig.org or 212-788-7617 Stacey Radnor: sradnor@maig.org or 202-870-6668

[1] Armslist Power Search, available at: armslist.com/classifieds/powersearch, last accessed August 3, 2013

[2] City of New York, *Point Click Fire*, Dec. 2011, available at <http://on.nyc.gov/tYPRrF>

[3] Based on the sample size of 607 examined buyers, the confidence interval is calculated as $P \pm 1.96 * [(P * (1 - P) / n)^{.5}] = 3.3\% \pm 1.96 * (.033 * .967 / 607)^{.5} = 1.9\% \text{ to } 4.7\%$

[4] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Type Certificate Data Sheet No. A20WE," available at <http://bit.ly/1cLhTYG>

[5] Federal Bureau of Investigation, "NICS Operations Report 2012," available at <http://1.usa.gov/10xD0w4>

New Investigation By Mayors Against Illegal Guns Shows Thousands Of Individuals With Criminal Record

Written by Australian Business

The FBI conducts federal background checks for more than half of states, but 13 'point-of-contact' states implement and maintain their own background check system. Together, those states conducted some 8 million background checks in 2012, but information on the volume of checks, denials, and the prohibiting criteria cited for them are not available at this time.

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