

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1304

August 10, 2021

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you in Chicago on July 22 to discuss the launch of the Justice Department's regional firearms trafficking Strike Force in Chicago. I write today to urge that the Strike Force immediately prioritize the investigation and prosecution of straw purchases that supply firearms to individuals with felony convictions in the Chicago area.

This past weekend, Chicago Police Officer Ella French was fatally shot and her partner critically wounded during a traffic stop on Chicago's South Side. This was a devastating tragedy, made all the more infuriating by the fact that the shooting was allegedly committed with a straw-purchased gun. According to the charges filed by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois, the firearm used to kill Officer French and injure her partner was straw purchased from a gun dealer in northwest Indiana in order to arm another person who had a felony conviction. This is part of a longstanding and deadly pattern in Chicago of straw purchases being used to supply guns to those prohibited by law from using them. While Illinois has reformed its state laws to crack down on straw purchasing, often these purchases are made across state lines.

The straw purchase that led to Officer French's death is a call to action for the Justice Department's Strike Force. As you noted during your visit to Chicago, this Strike Force was established to coordinate efforts among United States Attorney's Offices, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and state and local law enforcement partners to investigate and prosecute firearms trafficking across jurisdictions. I urge you to direct the Chicago Strike Force to immediately launch a coordinated investigation and prosecution effort to crack down on straw purchases that supply weapons to individuals with felony convictions in Chicago. A sustained focus by the Strike Force on deterrence and accountability for straw purchases will help prevent shootings and save lives.

I know that your commitment to protecting public safety in Chicago is heartfelt, and I am grateful that you have established a Strike Force architecture that will enable the Justice Department to meaningfully address firearms trafficking into the Chicagoland region, particularly from northwest Indiana. Officer French's murder has highlighted the urgency of this task. I look forward to working with you to do all we can to reduce the scourge of deadly gun violence that straw purchases help to fuel.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator