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U.S. Congress Moves to Stem Flow of Guns to Caribbean with CATCH Act

Bipartisan effort seeks to reduce gun violence by curbing arms trafficking

Federal / **Published On March 26, 2024 05:27 AM /**

Staff Consortium **March 26, 2024**

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As Governor Albert Bryan Jr. [visits two Eastern Caribbean countries](#) this week, Congress announced a bill to curb one of the Caribbean community's most vexing foreign relations issues – the influx of American guns into the region.

House Representatives Joaquin Castro and Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, alongside Senators Chris Murphy and Tim Kaine, have introduced the Caribbean Arms Trafficking Causes Harm (CATCH) Act, which aims to curb the trafficking of arms from the U.S. to the Caribbean.

Castro said that the draft legislation builds on the success of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which focused on cracking down on straw purchases and domestic trafficking offenses. Now, “the CATCH Act will improve transparency and accountability within U.S. anti-trafficking efforts and prevent U.S. firearms from fueling gun violence in the Caribbean — especially in Haiti, where guns from the United States have played a tragic role in the ongoing security, political, and humanitarian crisis.”

Murphy conceded what Caribbean leaders have long maintained, that “the prevalence of illegal guns trafficked from the United States into the region is fueling this violence.”

The draft bill itself cites findings from law enforcement officials in Haiti, Antigua & Barbuda, and Jamaica, who have all identified Florida as “a significant source of illicit firearms.” It accepts the 2023 joint report from the Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) and the Small Arms Survey that calculates the average number of violent deaths in the region as “nearly triple the global average.” In establishing its premise, the legislation also notes the claim by Bahamian officials that “over 90 percent of firearms used in homicides and confiscated by authorities...are traced to manufacturers and retailers in the United States.”

Murphy believes that the CATCH Act would empower the newly established Coordinator for Caribbean Firearms Prosecutions to implement the provisions of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act as comprehensively as possible. The legislation requires the Attorney General to present an annual report to Congress on the coordinator’s work over the previous year.

With national security capabilities already stretched to the breaking point by rising levels of gun violence even before a 2022 report from the Department of Homeland Security showing a marked rise in the “quantity, caliber, and type” of weapons pouring into the region, Caribbean leaders made a [joint declaration in April 2023](#) which called on the U.S. to take action to stop firearms trafficking to the region.

This move by Congress is another step in the U.S. response to that call.