

2024 Update

THE SUPPLIERS OF AMERICA'S GUN VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC

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BRADY
UNITED AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE

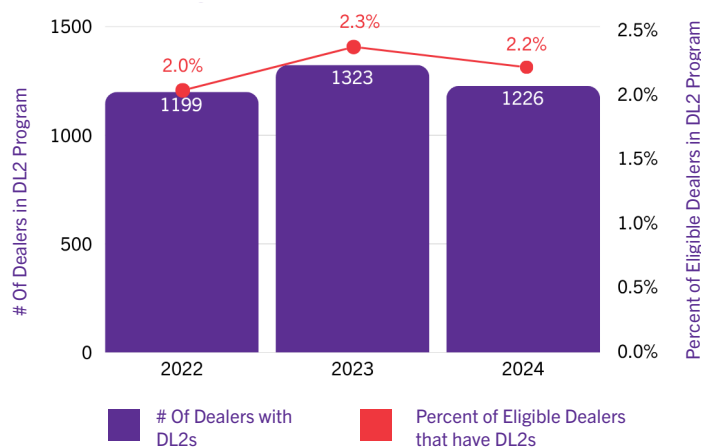
INTRODUCTION

Every gun on our streets starts somewhere, and the overwhelming majority begin in the legal marketplace. As part of our Combating Crime Guns program, Brady uncovers and analyzes data that helps us better understand how guns are diverted from the legal market to the illegal market, and ultimately make their way to being used in crime. A critical component of understanding and intervening in this diversion begins with identifying problematic gun dealers.

In 2023, Brady researchers released a [report](#) detailing their findings from Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) data, uncovered by Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. This data pertained to ATF's Demand Letter 2 (DL2) program, which puts firearm dealers on notice if a large quantity of firearms sold in their store are quickly recovered by law enforcement in connection with crime. Brady's 2023 report examined DL2 data from 2022 and 2023 and found that only two percent of U.S. gun dealers met the criteria for the DL2 program. It was the clearest look we have had in decades as to which gun dealers sell the most crime guns.

In this report update, we examine DL2 data from 2024, ultimately showing that many findings remain consistent across the three years. We also examine the correlation between state level gun laws and a state's number of DL2 dealers and provide a series of recommendations for how we can better address the small percentage of gun dealers contributing to the proliferation of crime guns in the United States.

HIGH CRIME GUN DEALERS NATIONWIDE



More than 400,000 guns were recovered from crimes and traced by law enforcement in 2023¹ — many of which were first sold by just a small percentage of gun dealers.²

Today, Brady is [revealing](#) the gun dealers that supplied the most crime guns in 2023. These dealers, flagged by the federal government as part of its Demand Letter 2 (DL2) program, are outliers whose sales patterns often signal irresponsible business practices, gun trafficking, or straw purchasing. In recent years, federal officials finally began taking meaningful action against many of these problematic dealers, but that Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) policy (known as the Enhanced Regulatory Enforcement Policy (EREP), or “Zero-Tolerance” policy), was reversed in April 2025, with being that the burden of ensuring dealers follow the law now falling more on state and local officials.

Only 2% of eligible firearm dealers earn DL2 letters in a given year, consistent with Brady's findings from the groundbreaking [2023 report](#) that first examined DL2 dealers. Each year since 2022, more than 1,000 dealers earned the unenviable distinction of being in the DL2 program and more than 825 earned DL2 letters for all years 2022-2024.

What is a DL2 Dealer?

Retail gun dealers that were the source of at least 25 guns recovered by law enforcement in a single calendar year are DL2 dealers if the elapsed time between the sale and recovery of the gun is less than three years. Guns quickly moving from purchase to a crime scene is an indicator of trafficking³, straw purchasing⁴, and/or “off-the-books sales by corrupt [gun dealers],” according to ATF⁵. ATF requires these dealers to be part of its Demand Letter 2 program, which mandates them to submit more frequent paperwork to assist law enforcement in tracing guns recovered in crime⁶. However, some types of dealers are not eligible for the DL2 program, regardless of the number of crime guns sold.⁷

Selling crime guns is not simply the cost of a successful business. In fact, not one of the nearly 2,000 licensed gun dealers in New York and New Jersey were required to participate in the DL2 program in 2022-2024. Evidence shows that a dealer’s business practices have a direct correlation with the number of crime guns traced back to them⁸, and ATF has concluded that sales volume alone does not explain why dealers are connected to large amounts of crime guns.⁹

What is a Crime Gun?

A crime gun is a gun that has been recovered by law enforcement after being used in a crime, that is suspected of being used in a crime, and/or the possession of which itself is a crime.

Lax business practices are evident as many DL2 dealers have been cited by federal inspectors for violating federal firearms laws. Considering that most dealers are inspected by ATF once a decade¹⁰, it is troubling that more than 300¹¹ of the DL2 dealers were found to have committed serious violations of the law in just three years. Even more troubling is that these harmful dealers have been allowed to stay in the business of selling guns to the public.

Brady’s ever-growing Gun Store Transparency Project includes an easy-to-use map of thousands of dealers’ inspection results, illustrating the laws that each dealer violated and what corrective actions ATF took.

Historically, ATF has been lenient in its oversight of federal firearm licensees (FFLs), enabling dealers with repeated violations to remain in business. Less than 0.5% of inspected dealers’ licenses were revoked, despite the fact that a majority of inspections found violations of the law.¹² Astoundingly, from 2010 to early 2022, over 95% of dealers that failed to conduct background checks on one or more occasions were not recommended for license revocation.¹³ In 2021, only [27](#) dealers in the entire nation had their licenses revoked — a nearly 80% decrease from 2004,¹⁴ when there were 32,000+ fewer FFLs in the country.¹⁵

ATF dramatically improved enforcement of the law for dealers starting in mid-2021 under an Enhanced Regulatory Enforcement Policy (EREP). No longer were serious violations of the law swept to the side with a slap on the wrist; revocation became the default recommendation for inspections that discovered that the dealer had willfully and knowingly committed certain particularly egregious violations, including selling guns to prohibited people, not conducting background checks, and falsifying records. During the time the policy was in force, 2% of inspected dealers had their licenses revoked — a four-fold increase.¹⁶ A little over three dozen of these revocations¹⁷ were known DL2 dealers, who collectively supplied at least 8,000¹⁸ crime guns —

and likely many more.¹⁹ (ATF’s interpretation of [federal data restrictions](#) make it incredibly difficult, and often impossible, for the public to access the exact number of crime guns a dealer has supplied.) Unfortunately, Attorney General Pam Bondi announced an [end](#) to the enhanced enforcement policy in Spring 2025, and has even invited dealers who willfully violated the law to reapply for their revoked licenses.²⁰

CASE STUDY

FOUNTAIN FIREARMS

Fountain Firearms was a gun dealer in Houston, Texas, with a long history of both violating the law and supplying crime guns. The dealer was in the DL2 program in 2021 and 2022, and finally had its license revoked in 2023 due to one or more EREP violations.²¹

While the specific violations leading to the revocation are unknown, the dealer had a concerning history of violating the law, highlighted in a [2014](#) inspection report that [can be found](#) at Brady’s GunStoreTransparency.org. Both the investigator and the ATF supervisor recommended revoking the dealer’s license in 2014, but were overruled by their superiors at ATF. Fountain Firearms was allowed to stay in business and become a prolific crime gun supplier for nine more years.

Fountain Firearms had been cited for knowingly falsifying gun acquisition records, and could not answer ATF’s questions on where their guns came from. They also sold to at least one person who admitted to the dealer they were legally prohibited from buying firearms, and at least once failed to conduct a background check before selling a gun. In four inspections prior to 2014, ATF investigators concluded multiple firearms were missing from the store’s inventory. Missing firearms are serious, as they can be a key indicator of trafficking — potentially indicating that the dealer is selling guns “off the books” to prohibited purchasers.

Gun Store Transparency Project

Brady’s ever-growing [Gun Store Transparency Project](#) includes an easy-to-use map of thousands of dealers’ inspection results, illustrating the laws that each dealer violated and what corrective actions ATF took.

EXPLORE GUN STORE INSPECTION REPORTS

Loading 4,069 inspection reports. More reports regularly added.

Map

Table



Since at least 2004 there had been a clear pattern of behavior: Fountain Firearms was cited for more than 45 individual violations from 2004-2014, most of them repeated in more than one inspection. In fact, the dealer had repeated violations in every inspection since 1984. ATF’s move to shut down Fountain Firearms in 2023 came many years and many crime guns too late.

CASE STUDY

LOCKS PHILADELPHIA GUN EXCHANGE

Locks Philadelphia Gun Exchange was a large crime gun supplier that had its license revoked for willfully committing EREP violations in July 2023.²² Between 2018-2020, Locks supplied nearly 500 crime guns

recovered in Pennsylvania, and from 1996-2020 that number was at least 2,500, including 68 guns that were recovered in homicide investigations. In one case, Locks sold a firearm to a man who killed his family – including a 7-year-old – mere hours later. The owner of Locks claimed, “We do everything by the books.”²³ But the facts tell a different story. Locks was a DL2 dealer for at least four years,²⁴ including the three years before their license was revoked.

Unsurprisingly, Locks had a long history of violating the law. One [inspector’s report](#) recapped the 23 violations of the law found over five inspections from 2000 to 2016. In three of those years, Locks committed enough serious violations to warrant the most severe action ATF can take short of revoking a dealer’s license — a warning conference. In one of those years, Locks met all the qualifications for license revocation, but ATF instead decided to have a third warning conference. And in 2016, the ATF investigator again found that revocation was warranted, but ATF superiors decided to issue an even milder remedy, a warning letter.

In addition to being cited three times for missing firearms (2000, 2011, 2016), Locks was also found three times to have failed to have filed multiple sales reports (2006, 2011, 2016), which helped ATF find and shut down trafficking rings. Gun dealers are legally required to report to ATF when a purchaser buys more than one handgun in a short period of time. Dealers have a financial disincentive to file these reports — a dealer cannot profit when traffickers are caught by law enforcement. Locks was found to have failed to file reports for **more than 40%** of its multiple sales in 2011 despite having affirmed, in the inspection immediately prior, they would stop ignoring the law. In 2016, Locks was yet again cited for this same violation.

The 68 homicide crime guns known to be supplied by Locks prior to their license being revoked represent an inexcusable failure of federal oversight.

STATE RANK OF DL2 DEALERS RELATIVE TO STATE POPULATION		
STATE	RANK IN 2024	RANK IN 2022 -2024 AVERAGED
South Carolina	1	2
Louisiana	2	1
Mississippi	3	3
Indiana	4	5
North Carolina	5	7
Arizona	6	4
Alabama	7	8
Georgia	8	6
Tennessee	9	10
Virginia	10	11
Missouri	11	12
Nevada	12	9
New Mexico	13	13
Ohio	14	14
Iowa	15	18
Arkansas	16	16
Kentucky	17	17
Alaska	18	33
Colorado	19	23
Florida	20	19
Delaware	21	15
North Dakota	22	34
Kansas	23	21
Texas	24	22
Wisconsin	25	24
South Dakota	26	27
Michigan	27	20
Pennsylvania	28	26

STATE RANK OF DL2 DEALERS RELATIVE TO STATE POPULATION		
STATE	RANK IN 2024	RANK IN 2022 -2024 AVERAGED
Nebraska	29	30
Illinois	30	29
West Virginia	31	25
Oregon	32	31
Utah	33	32
Oklahoma	34	28
Maryland	35	37
Montana	36	36
Minnesota	37	40
Vermont	38	39
California	39	41
Maine	40	43
Washington	41	38
Idaho	42	42
Rhode Island	43	35
New Hampshire	44	45
Connecticut	45	44
Massachusetts	46	46
Hawaii	No DL2s in 2022-2024	
New Jersey	No DL2s in 2022-2024	
New York	No DL2s in 2022-2024	
Wyoming	No DL2s in 2022-2024	

STATE LAWS SAVE — OR SQUANDER — LIVES

As the two case studies illustrate, until EREP was adopted by ATF in 2022, dealers could expect nothing more than minor corrective action for even the most

dangerous behavior. As the current administration backtracks on this and other key gun safety policies, state laws regulating gun dealers have become more important to ensure public safety. States with weak gun laws rank the highest in terms of DL2 dealers relative to population,²⁵ particularly those on the “Iron Pipeline” — the Interstate 95 corridor used to traffic firearms from southern states with lax gun regulations to major Northeast cities with stronger gun safety laws.²⁶ Consistent with national trends in [decreasing](#) violent crime, most states had fewer or the same number of DL2 dealers in 2024 than in previous years, with only 13 states seeing an increase. However, among these states a pattern emerges: the repeal of critical gun safety laws coincides with an increase in DL2 dealers.

Both North Carolina and Iowa recently repealed their laws requiring permits to purchase handguns,²⁷ laws which research has found²⁸ are critical in reducing gun trafficking.²⁹

North Carolina had the biggest increase in the number of DL2 dealers in the nation, climbing up to have the third most of any state (the top two states have more than twice the population of NC). North Carolina also had the biggest increase of any state in the number of crime guns, with over 1,300 more in 2023 than in 2022.³⁰ Iowa experienced a similar phenomenon, with the number of DL2 dealers rising 36% from 2022 to 2024.

Fortunately, the inverse is also true: Strong gun laws prevent gun trafficking. Four states continued to have zero DL2 dealers from 2022-2024. New York is particularly notable for remaining DL2-free, considering its size as the fourth biggest state in the nation.³¹ This can be attributed to New York’s commitment to implementing and enforcing common-sense gun safety laws. New York passed a law in 2022³² requiring gun dealers to institute policies to prevent sales to gun traffickers.³³ The law also required the state police to inspect dealers for compliance with the law every three years.³⁴

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the primary sources of crime guns, namely dealers in the DL2 program, allows policymakers to develop targeted strategies to reduce gun violence; researchers to study the impact of gun safety policies; and the public to hold the suppliers of crime guns in their communities accountable. Particularly, as federal enforcement of gun dealer regulations atrophies, the need for state and local government to take action grows. With this in mind, Brady makes the following recommendations:

STATES AND LOCALITIES

- Adopt a robust gun dealer licensing and inspection program to ensure compliance with federal, state, and local gun laws.
- Adopt gun dealer “code of conduct” legislation requiring firearms dealers to adopt employee training requirements, security measures, and other safe business practices.
- Institute requirements for dealers to sell weapons safely and responsibly, such as universal background checks and permit-to-purchase.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

- Implement responsible law enforcement weapons procurement practices, such as those in [Colorado](#) and several California cities, to ensure tax dollars do not go to gun dealers that break the law.³⁵ As the country’s number one buyer of firearms, state and local governments can incentivize firearm businesses to adopt safer business practices.

- Share information about local gun dealers and crime guns across jurisdictions, to disrupt regional gun trafficking patterns.

GUN OWNERS AND THE PUBLIC

- Purchase weapons only from gun dealers committed to responsible business practices.
- Advocate for more transparency by regulatory agencies overseeing gun dealers.

ATF

- Inspect dealers more frequently than once a decade.³⁶ To do so, ATF will need to be adequately staffed. ATF has been understaffed for decades,³⁷ with staffing levels failing to keep up with the growth in dealers: There are more than twice as many gun dealers in the U.S. as Starbucks and McDonalds combined.³⁸
- Reinstate the Enhanced Regulatory Enforcement Policy, a crucial tool in the fight against violent crime.

FIREARMS DEALERS

- Adopt and implement voluntary reforms shown to reduce gun trafficking and violence, including, but not limited to, those outlined in [Brady’s Gun Dealer Code of Conduct](#).
- Advocate for higher industry standards of gun dealer behaviors.

Data with the full list of DL2 Dealers can be found [here](#).

ENDNOTES

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10. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General. (2023). Audit of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Federal Firearms Licensee Inspection Program (Report No. 23-062). https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/23-062_0.pdf
11. 222 are currently available on the GunStoreTransparency website, and the rest will be added soon. The website only shows inspection reports that resulted in a Warning Letter or more severe administrative action "issued" to the inspected FFL from 7/1/2015 to 8/2/2018, and so far has ~75% of those uploaded.
12. For ATF fiscal years (FYs) 2013-2021. FY2021 was chosen as the cut off since EREP went [into effect](#) for ATF in July 2021, which is 75% of the way through ATF FY2021. Sources are ATF Fact Sheets - "Facts and Figures for Fiscal Year [year]" for 2013–21, accessed from the ATF website. None are available any longer on the ATF website, but Brady has pdf archives of the pages.
13. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General. (2023). Audit of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Federal Firearms Licensee Inspection Program (Report No. 23-062). https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/23-062_0.pdf
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24. The dealer received a DL2 letter in 2016, as mentioned in its 2016 inspection report, and Brady's DL2 database shows DL2 letters were also received in 2020, 2021, & 2022. The dealer was revoked before 2023 DL2 letters were sent out.
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Gun Analysis 28 (2016), <https://targettrafficking.ag.ny.gov/trafficking-report.pdf>; Cassie, R. (2020, November). The Iron Pipeline: The High-Capacity Handguns Fueling Baltimore's Epidemic Of Violence Increasingly Enter The City Through An Underground Network Of Out-Of-State Traffickers. Can Anything Be Done To Turn Off The Spigot? Baltimore Magazine. Retrieved January 12, 2024, from <https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/community/iron-pipeline-gun-violence-out-of-state-traffickers/>

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34. N.Y. Gen. Bus. Law § 87

35. Localities that have implemented procurement policies include: [San Diego](#) city, CA; [Oakland](#), CA; [San Francisco](#) consolidated city-county, CA; [Los Angeles](#) city, CA; [Los Angeles county](#), CA.

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