U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,
Firearms and Explosives

Public and Governmental Affairs

Washington, DC 20226

www.atf.gov

June 10, 2026

The Honorable Michael Cloud
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Cloud:

This letter is in response to your letters dated February 14, 2025, and February 3, 2026, to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) regarding the role of out-of-business records (OBRs) in the tracing process of firearms used in the commission of crime. Identical copies of this response will be sent to the other signatories of your letter.

ATF's National Tracing Center (NTC) maintains OBRs and provides critical trace information to assist our local, state, federal, and international law enforcement partners when investigating crimes. The NTC also uses this information to detect firearm trafficking, and track the intrastate, interstate, and international movement of firearms used in the commission of crime. Importantly, federal firearms licensees (FFLs) are required by 18 U.S.C. § 923(g)(4) to send firearm transaction records to ATF when their business is discontinued.

The importance of OBRs was vividly demonstrated on July 13, 2024, in the investigation of the attempted assassination of President Donald Trump at a campaign rally in Butler County, Pennsylvania. In an immediate response to the shooting, ATF initiated an urgent trace of the firearm used by the attempted assassin. The NTC completed a trace of the firearm within 30 minutes of the request and did so using OBRs. The firearm was purchased 11 years prior to that event and from a business that is no longer in existence. Absent the ability to review OBRs, the trace would not have been able to be completed. Without a successful trace, it could have taken investigators days or even weeks to locate the last retail purchaser of the firearm.

The identification of the attempted assassin in Butler County, Pennsylvania, is merely one example of the critical work that the NTC carries out every day to help our law enforcement partners investigate violent crime. In your letter, you raise several issues. To the extent possible, we address the issues below.

Issue 1: Of the annual trace data that you provided in your response letter in 2022, how many and what percentage of traces were conducted that required records older than 20 years?

Answer: In 2022, 10.35% of the 623,654 traces involved records 20 years or older.

Issue 2: Please provide a breakdown of the trace requests conducted and percentage of traces for firearms that required records which were 10 years old, then 11 years old, and for every year after up to 20 years.

Answer: Please see the charts below.

FISCAL YEAR	10 Year Count	%	11 Year Count	%	12 Year Count	%	13 Year Count	%
2017	6,259	1.53%	5,252	1.28%	4,337	1.06%	3,976	0.97%
2018	6,651	1.50%	6,417	1.45%	5,261	1.19%	4,222	0.95%
2019	7,703	1.70%	6,203	1.37%	5,729	1.27%	4,645	1.03%
2020	7,985	1.63%	6,985	1.42%	5,685	1.16%	5,231	1.07%
2021	7,229	1.32%	7,089	1.29%	6,086	1.11%	4,712	0.86%
2022	10,260	1.65%	7,690	1.23%	6,738	1.08%	6,687	1.07%
2023	13,967	2.16%	9,801	1.52%	7,562	1.17%	6,612	1.02%
2024	12,515	1.96%	12,691	1.99%	9,231	1.44%	6,991	1.09%
2025	13,824	2.11%	11,967	1.83%	12,403	1.89%	8,776	1.34%

FISCAL YEAR	14 Year Count	%	15 Year Count	%	16 Year Count	%	17 Year Count	%
2017	3,748	0.92%	3,496	0.86%	3,433	0.84%	3,795	0.93%
2018	3,879	0.87%	3,802	0.86%	3,477	0.78%	3,422	0.77%
2019	3,857	0.85%	3,514	0.78%	3,410	0.75%	3,103	0.69%
2020	4,260	0.87%	3,687	0.75%	3,278	0.67%	3,210	0.65%
2021	4,276	0.78%	3,732	0.68%	3,111	0.57%	2,775	0.51%
2022	5,122	0.82%	4,359	0.70%	3,923	0.63%	3,302	0.53%
2023	6,374	0.99%	4,857	0.75%	4,343	0.67%	3,669	0.57%
2024	5,996	0.94%	5,904	0.92%	4,716	0.74%	4,000	0.63%
2025	6,957	1.06%	5,759	0.88%	5,694	0.87%	4,426	0.68%

FISCAL YEAR	18 Year Count	%	19 Year Count	%	20+ Years Count	%	Total Traces*
2017	3,469	0.85%	3,258	0.80%	72,759	17.80%	408,762
2018	3,805	0.86%	3,392	0.77%	75,271	16.98%	443,383
2019	3,070	0.68%	3,416	0.76%	68,783	15.22%	452,844
2020	3,031	0.62%	2,848	0.58%	64,826	13.21%	490,844
2021	2,741	0.50%	2,627	0.48%	60,097	10.96%	548,186
2022	2,750	0.44%	2,641	0.42%	64,546	10.35%	623,654

2023	3,279	0.51%	2,705	0.42%	68,151	10.55%	654,769
2024	3,615	0.57%	2,993	0.47%	66,498	10.40%	639,295
2025	3,907	0.60%	3,422	0.52%	67,474	10.30%	654,878

Issue 3: Of the nearly billion records you reportedly have on file, how many of them involve transactions that are older than 20 years?

Answer: Of the 10.2 million trace requests processed by the NTC between 2000 and 2025, 51.39 percent were completed using OBRs. The data above reveal that, on average, 12.86% of all traces since 2017 have involved records that are at least 20 years old, averaging 66,642 traces per year.

Issue 4: Your response states that the NTC does not have the ability "to determine the successful prosecution of hundreds of thousands of crime gun traces," nor can it "link a trace for a specific prosecution." We understand these limitations. Without these numbers, what concrete evidence can ATF provide to demonstrate that records older than 20 years are useful or necessary for ATF to complete firearm traces?

Answer: The data above demonstrates that crime gun trace requests consistently require the use of records from out-of-business FFLs that are at least 20 years old. NTC's traces have provided law enforcement investigators across the country information on a first purchaser more than 75% of the time (75.2% in 2025). Of those successful crime gun traces, the likelihood that the records for the first purchaser are at least 20 years old is 12.86% (based on the annual average since 2017). Finding the crime gun's first purchaser – even one from 20 years ago – is important lead information, as it gives law enforcement investigators a starting point for asking questions about the crime gun's chain of custody. Without these records, law enforcement would be denied investigative leads 12.86% of the time. Finally, while firearm purchaser information is a valuable component of many criminal investigations, we acknowledge the privacy concerns raised in your letter. President Trump's 2025 Executive Order on Protecting Second Amendment Rights directed the Attorney General to assess ongoing infringements of Americans' Second Amendment rights and review promulgated rules pertaining to firearms and/or FFLs. As a result of this review, ATF published a proposed rule to replace the current practice of indefinite records retention for FFL records with a defined period for ATF Forms 4473 and A&D records of either 20 or 30 years. The rule also proposes a 20- or 30-year retention period for ATF's OBR Center at the NTC. ATF encourages all interested constituencies to submit comments on this NPRM.[1]

Issue 5: Your response states that "the NTC only traces crime guns, and every time must be identified as such by the requestor selecting the appropriate crime codes." Please provide a list of all the crime codes a law enforcement agency must choose from when a trace is requested.

Issue 6: Please provide a breakdown of all the trace requests conducted in the last three years by the crime codes that NTC uses.

Answer to issues 5-6: Under 18 U.S.C. § 923(g)(7), the NTC is authorized to trace a firearm for a law enforcement agency only in connection with a bona fide criminal investigation. As requested,

[1] *See* 91 FR 24413. *available at* https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/05/06/2026-08929/firearm-records-retention-periods

we have provided as a separate attachment, bearing Bates numbers Rep. Michael Cloud-001-008, the list of crime codes that law enforcement agencies selected when requesting a crime gun trace between FY2023 and FY2025.

Issue 7: The Out of Business Records Imaging System is simply one database. Can you provide the number of records included in each of ATF's other databases which include firearms purchaser information, like the Multiple Sales System, Access 2000 (A2K), and the Firearm Recovery Notification Program (FRNP)?

Answer: The OBR scanning process (as well as the electronic media conversion process) ensures that OBRs are uploaded into the Enterprise Content Management repository as "non-searchable, static images." ATF takes proactive measures to ensure that maintained records are compliant with the prohibitions against a national firearms registry. Furthermore, ATF takes proactive measures to ensure that any crime gun trace using OBRs is limited. As part of the OBR scanning process, the image files are indexed/tagged by FFL number and in limited cases may also have a secondary index to the firearm descriptors (e.g., serial number). The FFL number serves as the primary OBR search parameter when processing a trace request, which consists of following a firearms chain of distribution from its point of introduction into U.S. commerce by a licensed manufacturer or importer, through a distributor/wholesaler, and typically one or more retail FFLs before it is ultimately sold to an individual purchaser. In limited instances, a search may be narrowed further by categories such as serial number and document type (A&D, 4473, etc.) to help narrow the results. ATF does not utilize optical character recognition or similar technologies to capture purchaser names or other personally identifiable information (including any metadata) associated with OBRs. Therefore, it does not have the capability to conduct a search of the OBR by an individual's name or other personally identifiable information.

Below is a chart identifying the approximate number of OBRs that are stored in the Digital Reel System as converted microfilm/microfiche, those in the Enterprise Content Management (ECM) system, and those in hardcopy pending conversion:

ESTIMATED OUT OF BUSINESS FFL RECORD COUNTS (as of 05/19/2026):

OUT OF BUSINESS (OOB) RECORD FORMAT	COUNT
IMAGES STORED IN ECM SYSTEM	912,184,571
IMAGES STORED IN DIGITAL REEL (CONVERTED MICROFILM/MICROFICHE)	397,009,542
PAGES IN HARDCOPY (PENDING IMAGE CONVERSION)	104,894,400
TOTAL OOB RECORD IMAGES/PAGES	1,414,088,513

*For reporting purposes, an image is the equivalent of a single one-sided page of a document

With respect to your questions about other ATF databases used as part of crime gun tracing identified in your letter as potentially containing firearms purchaser information, we reiterate our responses from our letter dated April 14, 2023:

- The Access 2000 (A2K) system, which was developed in response to requests from firearms industry members, was replaced by NTC Connect in February 2019.[2] ATF is limited to conducting a search by serial number only and is therefore unable to quantify the number of records in NTC Connect that may include firearms purchaser information. To limit the likelihood of retail purchaser information being accessible, authorization to participate in the NTC Connect program is limited to firearm manufacturers, importers, and wholesalers/distributors only. Retail level FFLs are not permitted to use NTC Connect.

- The Firearms Tracing System (FTS) maintains multiple sales transaction records. In accordance with longstanding ATF policy, at the beginning of each month ATF purges individual purchaser names from multiple sale transaction reports after 24 months of the purchase date, unless the transaction matches an associated crime gun trace request.

- The Firearm Recovery Notification Program does not contain firearm purchaser information.

Please do not hesitate to contact ATF's Legislative Affairs Division at (202) 648-8510 or atflegislativeaffairs@atf.gov if we may provide additional assistance regarding this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

JUSTIN WARD

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Justin Ward, DPA
Assistant Director
Public and Governmental Affairs

[2] NTC Connect allows for secure cloud-based storage of limited acquisition and disposition (A&D) information (the data remains property of the FFL and is not stored on an ATF network). NTC Connect provides a secure internet-based user interface, through which authorized NTC personnel can only conduct a query by serial number only against a participating FFL's electronic A&D records within NTC Connect. NTC Connect participation is limited to firearm manufacturers, importers, and wholesalers/distributors, which do not typically transfer firearms to non-licensed individual purchasers.