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# The Bid to Stop Gun Trafficking

Instructed by President Obama to find ways to curb gun violence after the Connecticut school massacre, a working group led by Vice President Joseph Biden Jr. appears ready to recommend a package of proposals that go beyond reinstating the expired ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

Mr. Obama has already expressed support for a bill being prepared by Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, that would provide a more effective ban on military-style assault weapons than the law that lapsed in 2004. The Biden task force, according to [a report in The Washington Post](#), is considering a broader range of other measures backed by key law enforcement leaders and by Mayors Against Illegal Guns, the group started by Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York.

These measures include making background checks universal for all gun buyers, creating a national database to track the movement and sale of firearms, expanding mental health checks, and increasing penalties for carrying guns near schools or giving guns to minors.

Even this sensible list could be enlarged and improved. Notably missing is a concerted crackdown on illegal gun trafficking. The task force's final recommendations, which are due to be released by the end of the month, should include a measure to stem the illegal gun trade and make it easier for law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute gun traffickers and the straw buyers and rogue dealers who enable them.

A strong starting point is a measure first proposed four years ago by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a New York Democrat, which she is about to reintroduce in the new Congress.

The [Gun Trafficking Prevention Act](#) would create, for the first time, a separate criminal offense for gun trafficking. It would also toughen penalties at every point in the trafficking chain — from straw buyers who purchase a gun for someone else to evade required record-keeping and background checks, to corrupt gun dealers who supply illegal weapons to the kingpins running the trafficking rings. Study after study has shown that a tiny minority of bad gun dealers are responsible for selling a huge number of the guns traced to crimes.

The measure would give the Justice Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives new authority to impose civil penalties and special restrictions, like increased inspections and inventory checks, on "high-risk" gun dealers suspected of assisting traffickers. Finally, it would authorize the addition of hundreds of new agents and other personnel for the underfinanced bureau to allow for more frequent inspections of all gun stores.