

Second of Three Key Recommendations by Cummings Adopted

Washington, DC (Nov. 1, 2011) – Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, applauded changes to the United States Sentencing Guidelines that go into effect today to increase criminal penalties for so-called “straw purchasers” of firearms.

Cummings proposed this change as one of three key recommendations in a report he issued in June entitled, [Outgunned: Law Enforcement Agents Warn Congress They Lack Adequate Tools to Counter Illegal Firearms Trafficking](#). Another recommendation, reporting multiple sales of high-powered long guns, was implemented by the Department of Justice on [July 11, 2011](#). Cummings’ third recommendation—to enact a dedicated firearms trafficking statute—remains stalled in Congress.

“I commend the Department of Justice and the United States Sentencing Commission for taking these important steps to help shut down Mexican drug cartels and ensure that these criminals receive more than a slap on the wrist,” said Cummings. “It is time we give our law enforcement agents the tools they need to stop the tide of high-powered firearms flowing south into Mexico and to help keep our communities safe on both sides of the border.”

With these amendments, the base sentence for a first-time offender will be 15 to 21 months of prison time. Under the previous guidelines, most offenders received sentences of probation.

[Cummings’ report](#) explained how law enforcement agents testified before the Oversight Committee that criminal penalties for straw purchasers are too weak to deter illegal conduct or encourage cooperation with law enforcement after arrests. Agents also testified that it was difficult to convince federal prosecutors to take such cases.

Cummings and Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY) [have introduced legislation](#) to implement the report’s third recommendation, which is to enact a dedicated firearms trafficking statute. Despite endorsements from law enforcement agents on the ground, Republicans in Congress have refused to call up the bill for a vote and instead have introduced legislation to drastically cut resources available to federal law enforcement officials combating Mexican drug cartels.